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Election '96

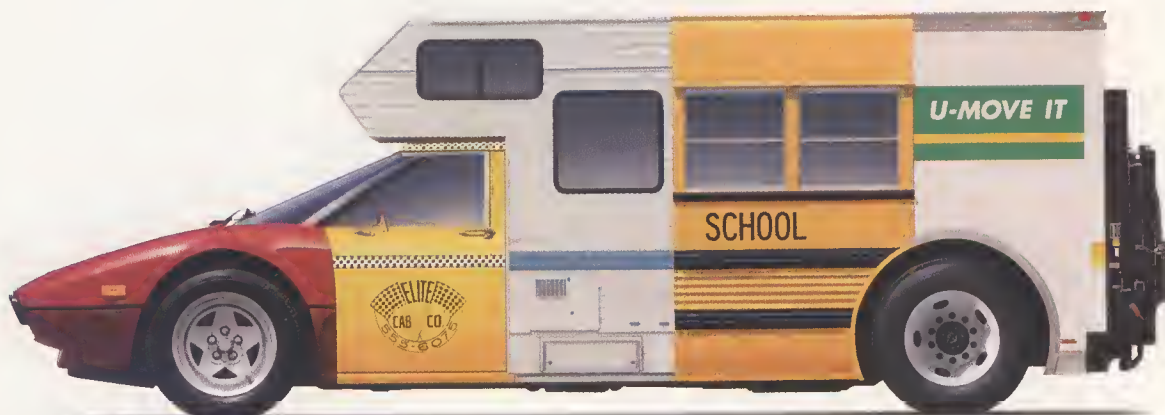
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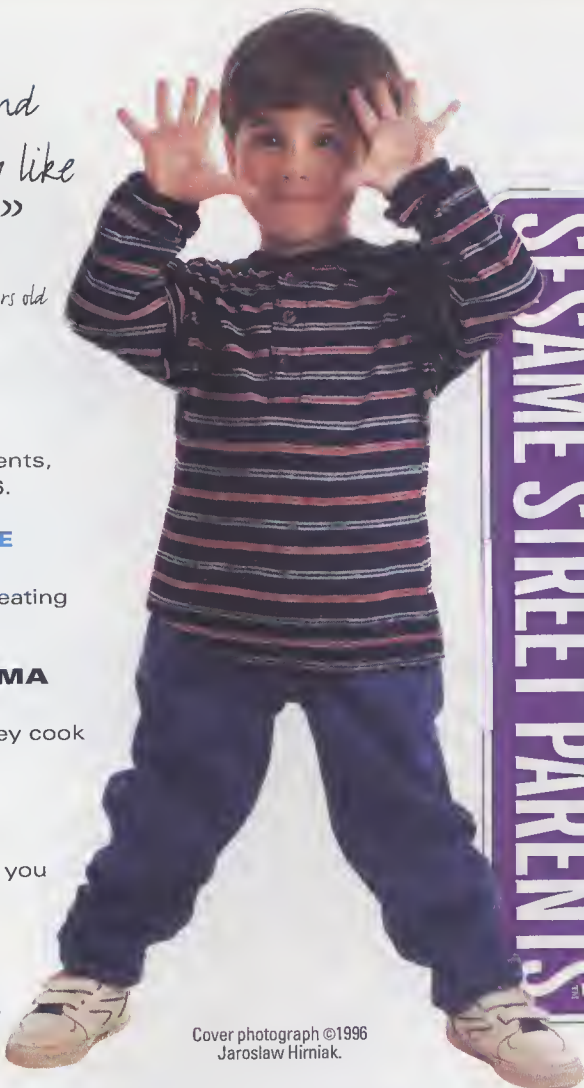
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"I like puzzles and games. But I really like toys that go!"

— Adam Grossman, four years old



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You've got so many decisions to make. We can help

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Right Choice

You could say that it's true of all of life, but it seems to me that being a parent means spending a huge amount of time making choices. *What should we name our child? Should our son go to this preschool or that? Should we move the baby out of the room now or later? Do we need to mention that problem to the doctor?*

Making the right choice is never easy. Opening one door means turning your back on another; in essence, choosing means losing other options. But parents must be decision makers because our children depend on us. And so we make decisions.

This issue of *Sesame Street Parents* is intended to help you with that job. We won't make any decisions for you. What we do offer is information that can better equip you to decide what's best for your family.

The decisions I'm thinking of are ones that range from small to large, from personal to political. "And the Winners Are..." our annual roundup of the best toys of the year, provides a lot of information about new playthings that parents, kids, researchers, and developmental experts told us had real value for young children. We think the story will help you find a toy that will delight your preschooler.

Our Election '96 package is about something much bigger: this year's presidential election. Here, too, we gathered a lot of information from parents about their needs. Then we researched what President Clinton and Senator Dole have done about those concerns. Finally, we got both candidates to speak directly to you about what they intend to do for families.

We think our decision to include both guides was a good one. I hope you agree. Enjoy the issue.



IRA WOLFMAN, EDITOR IN CHIEF

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Sesame Street Magazine and *Sesame Street Parents* have created a special network of parents to provide us with information about issues facing today's families. Network parents respond to mail questionnaires and telephone surveys. If you would like to join our nationwide network, please fill out this form. (Note to current members: Please reregister.)

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Mail to Network '96, *Sesame Street Parents*, P.O. Box 3248, Wallington, NJ 07057.

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Ready,



Set,

Our readers talk back LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Athletic Girls

We enjoyed "What Girls *Don't* Get From Gym Class" [Newsbriefs, September 1996]. Our four-year-old so enjoys soccer and other sports that we've enrolled her in athletic groups this fall. Thanks for encouraging us to support our daughter's interest in traditionally male sports. It's also good to know that she'll benefit from these activities.

Donna Strickland
Garner, NC

Breast-feeding Benefits

Thanks for "Breast-feed for Less Stress" [Newsbriefs, September 1996]. It was stress-reducing for me to nurse my babies; it's nice to read about a study that supports this.

Donna Strickland
Garner, NC

Lead-poisoning Alert

I was pleased to read about *Sesame Street's* efforts to prevent lead poisoning [Newsbriefs, July-August 1996]. I hope your magazine will also spread the word about the latest lead-poisoning threat: imported vinyl miniblinds. I was very upset to see in my local paper that these blinds can deteriorate

and form a lead dust that poses a hazard to young children. This news has not received much coverage in my area, and I could have easily missed the article!

Kim Schnitzius
Pembroke Pines, FL



We welcome letters from our readers.

Write to:

**Sesame Street Parents,
One Lincoln Plaza, New York, NY 10023**

E-mail letters to sspleters@aol.com,

or fax them to 212-875-6105.

**Include your address and
daytime phone number.**

Letters may be edited for space and clarity.

Editor's note: *Sesame Street Parents* will discuss the dangers of imported vinyl miniblinds in an article about lead poisoning in our March 1997 issue. However, if you have an immediate concern about these blinds, call the Consumer Product Safety Commission at 800-638-2772.

Potty-teaching Questions

"Look, Mom, No Diapers" [July-August 1996] was thorough, except for one point. You failed to mention encopresis, which is

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gO.

accidental soiling that occurs as a result of severe constipation. This condition can arise in toddlers when they withhold bowel movements from fear of using the toilet.

When we were teaching my oldest child to use the toilet, we made the mistake of pressuring her, and as a result she suffered from encopresis for over a month. By calming her down, backing off the potty teaching, and giving her prune juice and mineral oil, we were able to clear up the problem, and, thankfully, it has not returned.

*Cathy Crawford
Lindenhurst, IL*

In "'Look, Mom, No Diapers,'" a parenting expert recommends throwing a potty party for toddlers who have a toilet-learning setback. I disagree. Going to the toilet is a natural human bodily function; however, it is something that should be done in private. It is not a group activity.

*Diana McGrogan
Santa Clara, CA*

Yeast Infections

In Your Child's Health [July-August 1996], Dr. Dennis Vickers suggests treating yeast

We're On-line!

Children's Television Workshop has launched a site on the World Wide Web. It features choice articles from *Sesame Street Parents*, a reference library of previous articles, and games for preschoolers. Address: <http://www.ctw.org>

infections in children with an antifungal cream. I've found that feeding a child yogurt, dressing him in cotton underpants or diapers, and keeping the area dry also alleviates symptoms. I hope my tips are helpful.

*Chery Haggard
Napa, CA*

Web Site to the Rescue!

My new grandson was born with group B strep, and my brother, a physician, suggested that I check your web site for a layperson's explanation of the condition. Well, your site is great; I'll make sure my whole family, especially the new parents, have the address. I wish you'd been on-line 20 years ago!

*Tom Hebert
Via the Internet*

Dangerous Dogs

Gail Rosenblum's article about the potential threat of a child being attacked by a family dog [Newsbriefs, July-August 1996] was important. Over 5 years ago my 20-month-old son Geoffrey was killed by our family dog. I never thought our pet would snap at or bite anyone, but perhaps if I had read about the danger of dogs, I might have gotten rid of ours before it was too late.

*Juanita Smart
Edmond, OK*

Looking for Extraordinary People

Tell *Sesame Street Parents* about the extraordinary people you know—perhaps a neighbor who has worked to improve your local schools, or a family member who has triumphed over an illness. In our new feature, we plan to tell the stories of these heroes. If we use your suggestion, we'll pay \$25. Send information to Extraordinary People, *Sesame Street Parents*, One Lincoln Plaza, New York, NY 10023.

How do you make your family's holiday special?

PRACTICAL PARENTING

EDITED BY VICKI LANSKY

Tradition!

THE HOLIDAY SEASON FROM THANKSGIVING through Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa can be a hectic time for families. This year, instead of making that one last trip to the mall and baking another batch of cookies, give yourself permission to reflect on the true meaning of the holiday and enjoy this special time with your family. Below are some good suggestions for how to do just that. —V.L.

My two children and I enjoy a tradition that my mother started when I was a child. We bake cookies, which we make into "cheer packages" and deliver to elderly neighbors and shut-ins from our church. The children love helping out with the packages, and are learning that the true spirit of Christmas is in giving gifts from the heart.

*Elizabeth Fry
Mendon, MO*

As a single parent, I believe it is important that my son and I establish holiday traditions, just as other families do. So every year since he was born, my son's grandparents and I have decorated a tree for the holiday. The day after Christmas, we remove the decorations and plant the tree on his grandparents' land. This ritual is good for my son, and it helps the environment, too.

*Charity L. Bennett
Knoxville, TN*

It has become a yearly tradition in our family for both our seven-year-old daughter and two-year-old son to select a special

ornament for our Christmas tree. I keep a notebook for each child in which I describe what they selected and why.

As we decorate our tree with the ornaments we've collected over the years, we enjoy reminiscing about past Christmases.

*Peggy Ann Brown
Alexandria, VA*

Since my husband is Catholic and I am Jewish, the holidays are doubly fun and festive for our family. We give an annual latke dinner at our house, which both of our families attend. On Christmas Eve we go to my mother-in-law's home for a big celebration. In this way, our daughter, Chelsea, sees two families from different backgrounds respect and rejoice in each other's traditions. This is what we think the holidays are all about.

*Sheri Behrens
Irvington, NY*

I set out art supplies and paper and let my son and daughter create our family's Christmas cards. Spence and Sabrina

love making personalized cards and choosing the messages to go with their pictures. They are especially proud when they see their handiwork displayed at our family's and friends' homes.

*Sharon Stiegler
Carmel, IN*

We try to include our children in as many holiday activities as possible. Last Thanksgiving our older daughter Kelsey and I gathered leaves, ivy, acorns, and pinecones for a table centerpiece. At Christmastime she and her dad bake loaves of bread, which we wrap and give as gifts.

*Mary Betts
North Augusta, SC*

Instead of traveling to see relatives throughout the day, my husband and I and our two children, Michelle and Jake, spend a quiet Christmas Day at home. The following week-

end my nine siblings and I each bring our families to my mother's house. This gives the children a chance to visit with their cousins and celebrate Christmas twice.

*Judy Goodleaf Card
Shelter Island, NY*

Vicki Lansky is the author of many parenting and household hints books, including 101 Ways to Spoil Your Grandchild (Contemporary Books).

Share your ideas! Respond to the following question:

What do you do when your child wants a toy you don't approve of?

Send your answers, including your address and your child's age, to:

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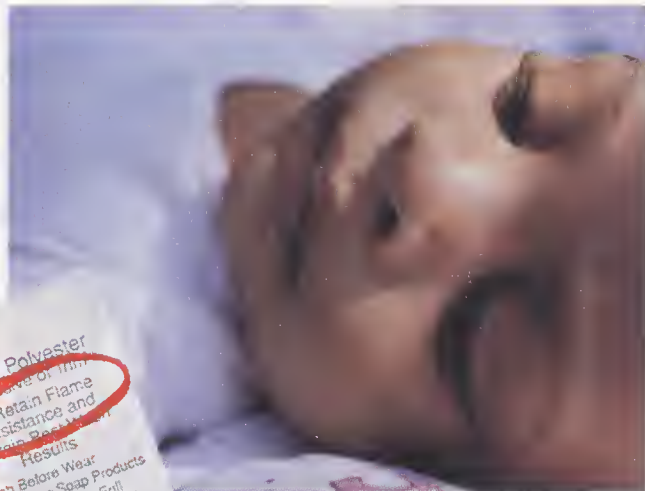
NEWSBRIEFS

BY GAIL ROSENBLUM

SLEEPWEAR ALERT

Some parents are finding it harder to sleep since the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recently changed manufacturers' standards for children's sleepwear. The new regulations allow sleepwear for children aged nine months and younger to be produced from materials such as untreated cotton, which is not flame-retardant. The CPSC states that as long as the sleepwear is tight fitting, it is less likely to ignite or burn quickly, and that children this age aren't mobile enough to get close to flames.

Not so, argues Sharon Gamache, executive director of the National Fire-Protection Association Center for High-Risk Outreach, a nonprofit organization involved in fire-safety education and research. "Many nine-month-olds can



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New sleepwear standards say cotton pj's are OK, but parents should make sure pajamas are tight fitting.

crawl or even walk toward the attractive hazard of an open flame," Gamache says.

Supporters of the changed standards argue that many parents already ignore the regulations in favor of more comfortable cotton sleepwear and oversize T-shirts. However, "CPSC wants to remind parents to put their babies in tight-fitting sleepwear, whatever its material, instead of loose-fitting garments," says Ken Giles, spokesperson for the CPSC.

As the battle heats up, concerned parents should ask for flame-retardant sleepwear; it's still available in most stores.

HELPING KIDS HELP OTHERS

Get the whole family involved in a volunteer project this holiday season! By having your kids volunteer, they'll not only help others but feel good about themselves, too. To receive a list of suggested family volunteering activities, such as cleaning up a neighborhood park or visiting a local nursing home, call the Points of Light Foundation's Family Matters Program at 202-223-9186, or write to them at Family Matters Program, POLF, 1737 H Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20010.

ILLNESS ON THE RISE: STREP THROAT MAKES A COMEBACK

Strep and strep-related illnesses, such as rheumatic fever, have reemerged as a serious public health problem in some parts of the United States, according to Edward L. Kaplan, M.D., professor of pediatrics at the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis Medical School, and an expert on group A streptococcal infections. Dr. Kaplan emphasizes that this makes early

diagnosis and appropriate treatment more important than ever. Symptoms of strep include a sudden onset of a sore throat, an elevated temperature, and, in



HAVE BOOK, WILL TRAVEL

Oh, the Places You'll Go! That's the theme of this year's National Children's Book Week, a celebration of children's literature. The Children's Book Council, which sponsors the annual event (November 18-24), reminds parents that some of the best places to go aren't far: Your local library and bookstore offer unlimited adventures.

For a free catalog of Children's Book Council materials for your youngster (full-color posters, \$8; friezes, \$7; streamers, \$9 per set of three), call 800-999-2160.

many cases, nausea and vomiting. Children under age five may exhibit a low-grade fever, malaise, and a clear discharge from the nose. If you suspect strep, consult your child's doctor. If a throat culture confirms the illness, a full course of oral penicillin will likely follow.

Continued NEWSBRIEFS



BRENDA KRAUSE EHEART

A HOPE, AND A HOME, FOR CHILDREN

Brenda Krause Eheart believes in recreating community—single-handedly. Eheart, a 51-year-old mother of two and professor of child development at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is the driving force behind Hope for the Children, an experimental community founded two years ago on the 22 acres of land that formerly housed the Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois. More than a dozen families with young children live on the base and serve as foster parents to some of the state's most difficult-to-place children. Happily, 90 percent of the children, many of whom suffer emotional problems



Brenda Eheart (left) greets Mark and Debby Owen and one of the Owens' six adopted and foster children, Stephen Tyler.

from years of abuse and neglect, are adopted by their foster families. In return for their work with these children, foster families receive free housing and \$18,000 a year.

Helping to round out the feeling of community, local senior citizens volunteer as crossing guards, maintenance workers, and dispensers of daily milk and cookies, in exchange for subsidized rent. Eheart, who has had a passion for helping children all her

adult life, secured initial funding for Hope for the Children with a \$1 million grant from the Illinois legislature; the community now receives an annual stipend of approximately \$500,000. "I am astonished and overwhelmed by the letters and support we're getting from all over the country," says Eheart. "Our staff's energy and loyalty to the program is unheard of. But then again," she adds, "you're talking about children's lives."

ADOPTION OPTIONS

Parents thinking about adoption should get in touch with Adoptive Families of America (AFA), a nonprofit information and advocacy organization. This month, the AFA notes, is National Adoption Month, which is designed to raise awareness of adoptive issues and to publicize the continuing need for adoptive families. "As many strides as we've made, we still need to work on behalf of children who need permanent homes," says Deb Harder, the AFA's director of programs. For your copy of *Guide to Adoption*, a comprehensive 80-page listing of adoptive options throughout the United States, send \$4.95 to Adoptive Families of America, 3333 Highway 100 North, Minneapolis, MN 55422, or call 800-372-3300.

GOING UP IN SMOKE

Did you know that a parent's cigarette habit may be one reason that a child reaches for cookies instead of carrots? A study in *Pediatrics* magazine of 515 low-income children's diets revealed that parents who were heavy smokers spent a smaller proportion of their income on healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables. This placed their children at higher risk of developing chronic illnesses, such as coronary heart disease, some cancers, obesity, and hypertension, in adulthood.

The authors theorize that the deficiency is due to a mistaken belief that low-fat, nutritious foods, like whole-wheat bread and yogurt, are expensive. A diet of these foods, in fact, costs the same or less than a high-fat, high-sugar diet.

Gail Rosenblum is a Minneapolis-based writer and editor. She is the mother of a seven-year-old girl and a five-year-old boy.



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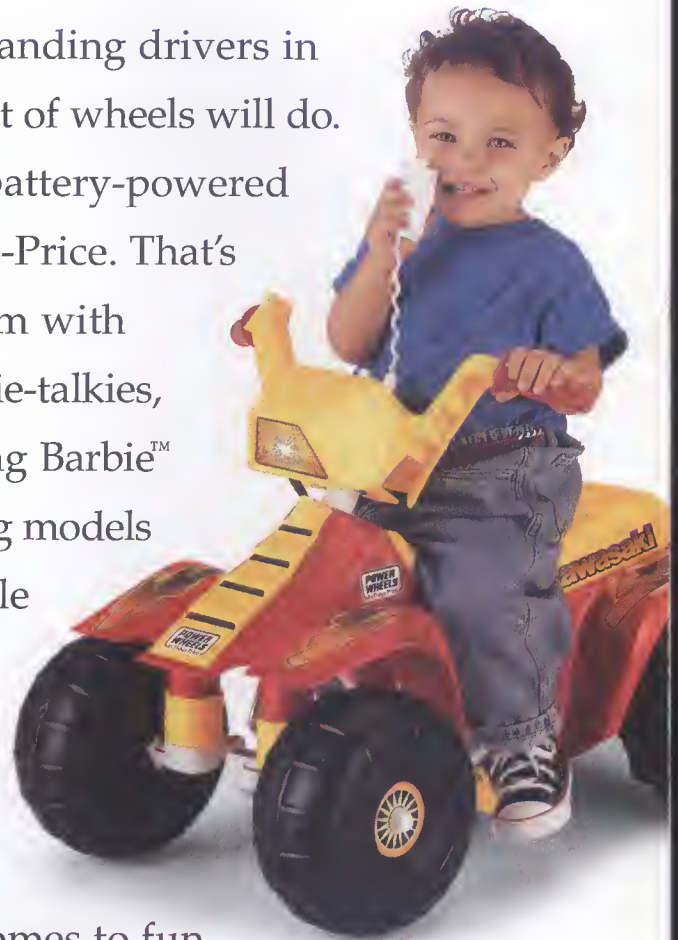
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Thinking about starting a home-based business? Here's how

FAMILY FINANCE

BY SUSAN BERGER

I'm the Boss!

WHEN MARALEE STRIKER of Wichita, Kansas, marketed her home-based desktop publishing service to clients, she toted samples of her work under one arm, and her infant daughter, Abigail, in the other. Striker, who had been working for a computer firm, originally planned to return to the company after giving birth. "But the minute I had my daughter, I said, 'No way,'" she recalls.

Striker's work situation is not unique. An increasing number of parents are running businesses out of their homes—many hoping that this will give them more time with their kids, says Paul Edwards, a coauthor, with Sarah Edwards, of *Finding Your Perfect Work* (Tarcher/Putnam). In fact, nowadays 48.4 percent of the almost 14 million small business owners in the United States have children at home.

PLANNING YOUR BUSINESS

Although there are advantages to being your own boss, starting a business takes time, money, and determination. To succeed, you have to plan carefully from the beginning, says Tina Egge, executive director of the Association of Enterprising Mothers, located in Carlsbad, California.

Here are some tips to help you get started:

Choose work you enjoy. "Pick a business that will succeed in today's market, but make sure you love what you do," advises Barbara Brabec, the author of *Homemade Money* (Betterway Books). Brainstorm with friends about businesses that could help make your lives easier. For instance, when Anne Wheeler of Upton, Massachusetts, noted that her son Grant hated cold baby wipes, she invented a baby-wipe warmer. Now, more than a decade later, Wheeler runs a successful company that sells products for children.

Choose a business that's family-friendly. Think about starting a company



that lets you work around your child's schedule. "If my daughter has had a rough day, I have to be able to shift my schedule and work when my husband is home to care for her," says Striker.

Create a niche. "Ask yourself who your clients will be—*anybody* is not the answer," says Sarah Edwards. Figure out how you will distinguish yourself from your competition and build your client pool.

Put together a business plan. Your local United States Small Business Administration (SBA) office offers business plan outlines and tutorials, as well as one-on-one counseling and links to other resources. Call the SBA Answer Desk at 800-8-ASK-SBA for the location nearest you. Or try a software package like *Business Plan Pro 1.21* for Windows 3.1 or higher (Palo Alto Software).

Figure out your financing. Depending on the type of business and what materials you will need to buy, getting a small enterprise up and running usually costs between \$4,000 and \$12,000, according to

Getting Started

Talking to other entrepreneurs is a great way to research the subject, but you may also want to check out the following resources for more information:

At-Home Dads This quarterly newsletter, which includes an **At-Home Dad Network**, is available to subscribers for \$12 per year. Contact Peter Baylies, **At-Home Dads**, 61 Brightwood Avenue, North Andover, MA 01845.

Honey, I Want to Start My Own Business: A Planning Guide for Couples by Azriela Jaffe (Harper-Business).

The Legal Guide for Starting and Running a Small Business by Fred S. Steingold (Nolo Press).

Paul Edwards. "Keep in mind that most banks won't loan money for business start-ups or to a company that's less than two or three years old," Edwards adds, "so you'll probably have to dip into your personal savings or credit." Consult a financial adviser to make sure that launching your own business is an investment you can realistically afford.

Investigate the law. Contact your local planning department or city clerk's office to find out the zoning laws in your area. Also get a copy of IRS Publication

587, *Business Use of Your Home*, for information about tax laws (800-829-3676).

Persevere. Seventy-five percent of home-based firms that identify themselves as businesses still exist five years after launching. So with planning and perseverance, you stand a reasonable chance of succeeding. "Running your own business isn't all peaches and cream," says Striker, "but the rewards are definitely worth it." ■

Susan Berger lives in New York City.

A talk with the man who brings Big Bird to life

SESAME STREET BEAT

BY P. J. TANZ

Without Feathers



All the world's a puppet show: Spinney, with two of his childhood friends.

EVERYONE KNOWS BIG BIRD. BUT not many people know Caroll Spinney, the puppeteer who has made the Muppet come alive ever since *Sesame Street* began. As the show's twenty-eighth season gets underway on November 18, we bring you a closer look at the man beneath the feathers.

"Big Bird likes to think of himself as a giant golden condor, but he's really just a very big bird!" Caroll Spinney laughs. And big he is! Even though he's supposed to be six years old, Big Bird, at 8 feet 2 inches, towers over his *Sesame Street* friends without batting a wing, and soars gracefully as one of preschoolers' favorite *Sesame Street* characters. "Children see Big Bird as a fellow child," explains Spinney. Because the sensitive bird has flown through many of the same experiences his preschool fans are encountering, they admire him as a role model and adore him as

a true feathered friend.

But the word on the bird is that he wasn't always the spring chicken we know today. Big Bird was first conceived by Muppet-master Jim Henson as a humorously goofy adult. But during *Sesame Street*'s first season, Spinney realized that the show would be better served if Big Bird were a child. "As with most art, creation comes from the soul," the 62-year-old veteran puppeteer explains. "I saw Big Bird as a wide-eyed six-year-old discovering the world."

WHERE DO PUPPETEERS COME FROM?

In 1942 Spinney himself was a wide-eyed child of eight when he put on his first pup-

pet show in his family's barn in Acton, Massachusetts. By the time he was 16, he had collected over 70 puppets, all of which his mother had made for him, and decided to dedicate his life to puppetry. And now, after having hosted his own television program and having performed in countless puppet shows, Spinney has made his nest on *Sesame Street* as Big Bird (he also plays Oscar the Grouch). "My greatest satisfaction is that I'm doing exactly what I wanted to do as a child," Spinney says.

Of course, the puppets Spinney performs with today are a bit more elaborate than those in his childhood collection. Big Bird is made of 4,000 dyed American Turkey feathers, each individually sewn or glued onto a mesh bodice. (And speaking of turkeys, although Big Bird is hard to find during the Thanksgiving season, rumor has it that he celebrates with a feast of roasted sesame seeds.) Inside the puppet, Spinney manipulates Big Bird's beak with one arm stretched above his head; he speaks Big Bird's lines into a wireless microphone and watches his performance on a miniature color monitor attached to his chest. (Spinney confesses to bringing scripts inside the 56-inch-waisted puppet to help him

remember the considerable amount of material taped each day.)

Although the man who brings Big Bird to life is rarely recognized out of costume, viewers know him better than they think. "Whether you see him or not, the puppeteer brings a lot of his own personality to the character he plays," Spinney explains. And fans have Spinney to thank for the Bird's warmth and compassion (which flow abundantly from the puppeteer). But don't tell that to the Bird. "He doesn't know he's a puppet," Spinney whispers, "and he wouldn't be happy to hear that there's a man inside." Probably once

Big Bird met the inspiring puppeteer, he wouldn't mind a bit. ■

Big Bird Tip of the Month



In the spirit of Thanksgiving and its traditional feast, this month *Sesame Street Magazine* is about food. To satisfy your child's appetite for reading, check out these books:

Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message by Chief Jake Swamp, illustrated by Erwin Printup, Jr. (Lee & Low Books). (Age 4 and older)
Jalapeño Bagels by Natasha Wing, illustrated by Robert Casilla (Atheneum). (Ages 4-8)
Oliver's Vegetables by Vivian French, illustrated by Alison Bartlett (Orchard Books). (Ages 4-8) —Judith Rovenger

P. J. Tanz, assistant editor of *Sesame Street Parents*, has been an avid Big Bird fan since childhood.

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HOME VIDEO

Books, music, software, and video picks REVIEWERS' CHOICE

Books

As children get older, they start to observe just how different families can be. Here are six books that will answer some of your child's questions, and raise others. After reading these titles, you and your child will have much to discuss.

Families: Poems Celebrating the African American Experience, selected by Dorothy S. Strickland and Michael R. Strickland, illustrated by John Ward. Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press. Some of our best poets—Nikki Giovanni, Langston Hughes, and Lucille Clifton, among others—are represented in this collection of 23 poems that are great for reading aloud. Try Eloise Greenfield's "Honey, I Love":

*My cousin comes to visit and
you know he's from the South
'Cause every word he says just
kind of slides out of his mouth
I like the way he whistles and I like
the way he walks
But honey, let me tell you that
I LOVE the way he talks*

The sound of the words and the rhythm of the lines of each poem will make your child feel the singing joy of poetry. (Ages 4–8)



Brothers and sisters in exceptional families are the stars of *Finding a Way*.

Finding a Way: Living With Exceptional Brothers and Sisters by Maxine B. Rosenberg, photographs by George Ancona. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books. Clear photos and a positive, direct text show what it's like to be the brother or sister of a child with a chronic illness or physical disability.

Through the experiences of three families, your child will see that the sibling who's not ill or disabled also has difficulties, sometimes feeling ignored and afraid. This book sends an important message: All children want love and acceptance from their family. (Ages 5–8)

How I Was Adopted: Samantha's Story by Joanna Cole, illustrated by Maxie Chambliss. Morrow Junior Books.

This story tells children about adoption in a warm and easy way. Cheerful line-and-watercolor pictures, accompanied by an upbeat text, show that adoption is one way parents can create a loving family. Samantha, the narrator, tells her own story: how her adoptive parents went to the adoption agency, and how excited they were to get her and bring her home. In an introduction

for parents, Joanna Cole talks about raising an adopted child. (Ages 4–7)

The Relatives Came by Cynthia Rylant, illustrated by Stephen Gammel. Simon & Schuster; Aladdin, paper. The physical uproar of an extended family's get-together

is joyfully expressed in simple words and exuberant colored-pencil illustrations. When the relatives come up from Virginia: "You'd have to go through at least four different hugs to get from the kitchen to the front room." Your child will love the messy, affectionate scenes; he'll also recognize how wild and crowded it is when visitors first come, and how empty it feels when they leave. (Ages 3–6)

Sitti's Secrets by Naomi Shihab Nye, illustrated by Nancy Carpenter. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers. Every child who longs for a distant grandparent will recognize the feeling in this picture book about an Arab American child remembering her visit with Sitti, her grandmother, in a village "on the other side of the earth." The child remembers Sitti's house, the culture and the clothes, and the intimacy of brushing her grandmother's hair. She also remembers the painful leave-taking. The illustrations show the physical bond between child and grandmother when they're

close, and their imaginary connection when they're far apart. (Ages 3–8)

Hazel Rochman, an editor of Booklist, is the author of *Against Borders: Promoting Books for a Multicultural World* (ALA/Booklist).

PLEASE NOTE: The age recommendation for each item is based on our reviewers' judgment and may not correspond to the age range suggested by the publisher or manufacturer.

For Little Ones

"More More More," Said the Baby: 3 Love Stories by Vera B. Williams.

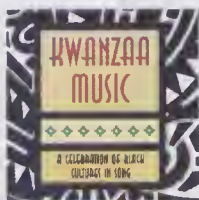
Greenwillow Books; Mulberry Books, paper. Adults and babies in three families (one white, one of mixed race, one Asian) play with and hug each other and never want to stop. Little Guy's dad swings him around and kisses his belly button. Little Pumpkin's grandma holds the girl nose-to-nose and counts and tastes each one of her toes. Little Bird's mama holds her in her arms and gives Little Bird a kiss right on each of her little eyes before she falls asleep. The message kids will get is that people everywhere love their babies. (Ages 1–4) —Hazel Rochman



Continued REVIEWERS' CHOICE

Music

Kwanzaa Music: A Celebration of Black Cultures in Song Various artists, selected by Eric V. Copage and Daisann McLane; Rounder Records, 800-443-4727; CD, \$15; cassette, \$9.50. This collection demonstrates the diversity of music with African roots. Composed and performed by artists such as Aretha Franklin and Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, from the United States, and Thomas Mapfumo and the Blacks Unlimited, from Zimbabwe, the songs are sung in a variety of languages that includes English, French, and Zulu. Beyond enriching a family's Kwanzaa observance, this recording will be appealing throughout the year. (Age 3 and up)



My Jewish Discovery Craig 'n Co.; Sweet Louise Music, 800-541-9904; CD,

\$14.98; cassette, \$9.98. On this Parents' Choice Gold recording for children, Craig Taubman presents songs and poems that celebrate American Jewish family life and culture. Combining fun and facts, English and Hebrew lyrics, rich vocals and full-tilt rock and roll, Craig has created a one-of-a-kind album that will be treasured by Jewish parents and their children. Highlights include "Deli-ightful," a lighthearted description of Kosher delicatessen cuisine, and "Holidaze," a chronological list of the Jewish holidays and observances. (Ages 3-6)

Raffi's Christmas Album Raffi; Rounder Records/Troubadour, 800-443-4727; CD, \$15; cassette, \$9.50. Parents and children will be reminded to savor the gentle side of Christmas when they hear this holiday album. Raffi skillfully blends traditional tunes ("Deck the Halls," "Silent Night," and "The First Noel") with some lesser-known tunes, including his own composition "Every Little Wish," Roger Miller's "Old Toy Trains," and the catchy call-and-response song, "Must Be Santa." (Ages 2-6)

Jill Jarnow is the author of several books, including *All Ears: How to Choose and Use Recorded Music for Children* (Penguin Books).

Video

Kidsongs: Baby Animal Songs Kid-Vision; 30 minutes; \$12.95. As with other popular Kidsongs titles, such as *A Day at Old MacDonald's Farm*, *Baby Animal Songs* is aimed at very young viewers. In this episode the Kidsongs Kids visit a petting zoo and sing their way through some lively numbers. The tape will be a hit with the "plastic pants" set, but parents should be advised that after six or seven hundred viewings, its relentless cheeriness wears a little thin.

Let's Explore...Furry, Fishy, Feathery Friends Braun Film and Video, 800-815-6205; 30 minutes; \$14.95 plus \$3.95 S&H. This splendid little how-to-pick-a-pet video will captivate preschoolers with its endearing images of birds, puppies, kittens, ferrets, hamsters, guinea pigs, and other animals. Particularly impressive is the way Mckenzie Rosen-Stone, the video's child star, handles all the animals—spiders included (eww!)—without any apparent squeamishness. (Age 2 and up)

Fiona Zippan and Doug Atkinson are the authors of *Videos for Kids* (Prima).

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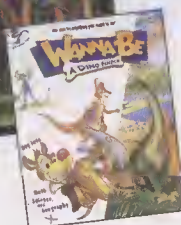
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New From Children's Television Workshop

Koosh Sesame Street Characters OddzOn Toys, suggested retail price, \$6.99 each. Yikes! These Koosh Balls have sprouted heads, arms, and legs that belong to none other than your child's *Sesame Street* pals Elmo, Zoe, Cookie Monster, and Big Bird. The original rubber pom-pom Koosh Balls were easy to throw and catch. This new variety isn't really meant to be tossed around (the plastic appendages get in the way). Still, preschoolers will love they way they feel, and will probably carry them around the house...and to the playground...and to dinner...and to Grandma's...and to the mall...and to... (Age 3 and up) —Linda Bernstein

Another Monster at the End of This Book by Jon Stone, illustrated by Michael Smollin. Golden Books. Grover's at it again in this sequel to a beloved *Sesame Street*/Golden Book. He paper clips pages together and erects barricades of alphabet blocks just so he and Elmo won't get to the maybe-friendly, possibly scary, monster at the end of the book. But resourceful Elmo asks your child to turn the pages; eventually everyone gets to the surprise: Elmo and Grover are the monsters at the end of the book! This story will help preschoolers learn about mastering fear. Like Elmo, they'll want to go back to find the monster again. (Ages 3–5)

software

My Make-Believe Castle Virtual Entertainment, 800-301-9545; Windows/Macintosh CD-ROM; \$39.95. With the click of a mouse, preschoolers can choose a medieval cyber-pal and make her do some really neat things. For instance, your youngster can put a princess on a horse, have her race across the castle's great hall, and send her into a somersault (while she's still on the horse). Experienced players can program the characters to do things like fall into a puddle of water. *My Make-Believe Castle* encourages exploration, and there's enough variety here to keep children interested long after they master the basic moves. (Ages 4–7)

Zurk's Learning Safari Soleil Software, 800-501-0110; MS/DOS or Macintosh disk, or Windows/Macintosh CD-ROM; \$29.95. This program offers six simple learning games for very young animal lovers. In one game, kids decipher clues and help Maya, a lost lion cub, find her parents. In another, preschoolers can click on letters in a bowl of alphabet soup and watch them morph into animals whose names begin with the selected letter. Younger players may need help with some of the games, but a very useful parents guide provides clear instructions and suggestions. (Ages 3–5)

Joshua Mills writes frequently about computers; Lisa deMauro is an author of children's books. They have two children.

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And the Winners Are...

How We Conduct Our Annual Toy Test

Last February the *Sesame Street Parents* toy experts, Shelley Pazer, Ph.D., and Ellen Sackoff of The Discovery Group (a youth-market research and consulting firm) attended the 1996 American International Toy Fair in New York City. From more than 6,000 new toys, they chose 200 to review. Of these, 60 toys were selected for three weeks of testing in six schools and three dozen homes with young children. Parents and teachers observed their kids at play and filled out questionnaires. In June children aged two to eight arrived at the offices of Children's Television Workshop, where they played with the toys under the watchful eyes of a team of researchers. Their parents met in focus groups with Sackoff and Dr. Pazer to share their recommendations. Finally, the Discovery Group compiled the results of the test. Diane O'Connell, who wrote the article, has been our toy reporter for six years. Aileen Love and P. J. Tanz were project assistants.

Our eighth annual awards for the year's best playthings

By Diane O'Connell

Photography by Tom McWilliam

Are you looking for a toy that's exciting and sure to be an ongoing source of entertainment for your kids? You've come to the right place.

This is what makes our Top Toys the best:

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And here are the 1996 winners: 27 kid-tested, parent-approved toys we know your child will love. ►

2-3 Years Old



Kids' Golf Cart and Clubs

Today's Kids, \$40-\$50

"Children asked to play with this toy every day, all day!" said Tracy Norris of the West Side YMCA Tender Care Child Care Center in New York City, where we tested it. The golf cart ride-on comes with golf clubs, balls, and a putting cup. The dashboard has a gear shift, a working horn, a key, and a scorecard decal.

Why It Won: Children took advantage of the toy's versatility: They rode on it and used it as a sports toy.

Ages We Recommend: 1½-3

Assembly: Minimal **Batteries:** None

Product Information: 800-258-8697

Cook 'n Play Kitchen Center

Playskool, \$69.99

This fully equipped play kitchen can fold for easy storage and portability. Included in the set are a toy microwave with working door and bell, a phone, a high chair for feeding a doll, a breakfast bar, and 14 kitchen accessories.

Why It Won: All the working parts of this set inspired kids to role-play, whether they were alone or in a group. Parents appreciated how easily the kitchen could be packed up and stored away.

Things to Know: Assembly can be time consuming. Some parents objected to the boxes of sugary cereal (included).

Ages We Recommend: 2-5

Assembly: Extensive **Batteries:** None

Product Information: 800-PLAYSKL

PLEASE NOTE:

The ages given were determined by our experts through testing, and are not necessarily those recommended by the manufacturer. It is illegal for the toy companies to mandate the prices at which their toys should be sold. Therefore, all the prices, whether approximate or exact, are suggested retail.



Baby Wiggles 'N Giggles

Tyco, \$20

Pick up this 14-inch doll and she wiggles and giggles with delight. Lay her down and she squirms and cries. How does she do it? A light-activated sensor in her bib makes her laugh when standing up and cry when lying down. The soft-bodied doll comes complete with a partially removable diaper and a "disappearing milk" bottle. **Why It Won:** Three-and-a-half-year-old Chelsea Braga's mother says it best: "Every time the doll cried, Chelsea fed it. She laughed when it giggled. She hasn't put it down since she got it." Because it is so cuddly and really seems to respond, our kid toy testers loved this doll.

Things to Know: The doll activates easily—much too easily for some. If you tire of hearing its cries and giggles, flip the off switch hidden in the doll's back.

Ages We Recommend: 3-4

Assembly: None

Batteries: 2 AA

Product Information: 800-FOR-TYCO ►

Dot the Dog

Parker

Brothers,

\$9.99-\$10.99

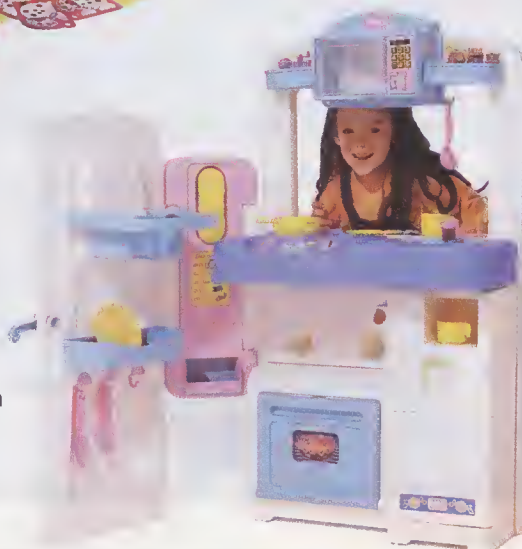
Dot, a plastic stand-up game board, looks like a beagle.

Wag her tail, and the pattern of her spots, the name beneath her tag, and the color and position of her fleas all change. Children aged three to five can then use the game cards to play one of several progressively difficult memory matching games.

Why It Won: Parents liked what this toy doesn't have: lots of pieces, noises, batteries, and complicated instructions. The toy can grow with your child, too, which means money well spent. Children found Dot fun to play with, with both parents and peers.

Ages We Recommend: 3-5

Assembly: None **Batteries:** None





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2-3 Years Old

Space Station

Little Tikes, \$130

Now kids can explore outer space without ever leaving their backyard. This unique play environment comes equipped with an entry hatch and an escape slide. Adding to the adventure are the detailed control panel with steering wheel, tinted observation window, and stars-and-moon ceiling.

Why It Won: Teachers at the preschools where this toy was tested said it really captured the kids' imagination, and helped them act out all sorts of adventures.

Things to Know: You'll need a large playroom or an outdoor play area for this toy.

Ages We Recommend: 2-5

Assembly: Moderate **Batteries:** None

Product Information: 800-321-0183



Toddle Tots Farm; Toddle Tots Farmobile

Little Tikes; Farm, \$20; Farmobile, \$13

"Heigh-ho, the derry oh," became the theme song for kids who played with this farm play set and truck (sold separately). The farm's barn doors swing open to let the chunky, squeezable animals out, and the back doors open

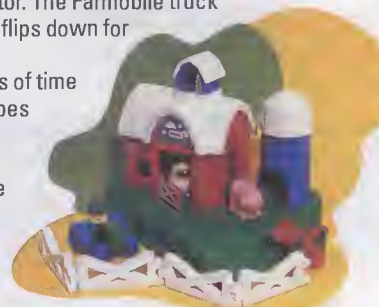
wide for easy access. The play set comes with a moveable fence, a cow, a sheep, and a pig, plus a farmer and tractor. The Farmobile truck includes a driver and has a tailgate that flips down for loading the animals.

Why It Won: Kids played for long periods of time with these sets. The chunky animal shapes were just right for little hands.

Ages We Recommend: 1½-3

Assembly: Minimal **Batteries:** None

Product Information: 800-321-0183



Tickle Me Elmo

Tyco Preschool, \$28

Elmo will have your kids rolling with laughter in no time. Tickle him once and he giggles. Tickle him a second time, and he laughs a little longer. Tickle him a third time and he shakes with uncontrollable mirth.

Why It Won: Our testers liked Elmo's soft, plush body and the sound of his voice, and found his giggles absolutely infectious. And what preschooler doesn't love Elmo?

Things to Know: Very young children may be startled when Elmo begins to wiggle. You may want to introduce this feature first before leaving the toy with your child.

Ages We Recommend: 2-3

Assembly: None

Batteries: 3 AA (included)

Product Information:

800-488-8697

Fluffy My Come Here Puppy

Kenner, \$46.99

Here's the perfect pet. It eats when you feed it a plastic bone and needs no paper-training. A voice-activated mechanism prompts Fluffy to bark. Leave Fluffy alone and she'll whimper and wag her tail, meaning "come play with me."

Why It Won: Children groomed the dog with its brush, cuddled it, and took it outside. Parents liked the sense of responsibility this toy inspired in their children.

Things to Know: The toy can be turned off if the barking and whimpering get on your nerves. And, like a real dog, Fluffy does tend to shed a bit.

Ages We Recommend: 3-5
Assembly: None **Batteries:** 3 C

Product Information: 800-327-8264 ►





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4-5 Years Old

Radio-Controlled Dump Truck

Tonka, \$49.99

Simplified design and operation allow four- to five-year-olds to enjoy playing with a radio-controlled vehicle—typically the domain of older children. This truck has two speeds and a tilt-back dump bed (which can be activated while the vehicle is moving). Kids can steer it left or right and forward or backward.

Why It Won: This is a very versatile toy: Children can use it indoors, and it operates on grass or pavement. The remote control intrigued kids, who enjoyed figuring out how it worked.

Things to Know: Kids aged three and younger may not have the manual dexterity to manipulate the remote control, but even two-year-olds had a great time playing with the truck.

Ages We Recommend: 3-5

Assembly: None **Batteries:** One 9 V, 4 C

Product Information: 800-24-TONKA



Dream Doll House Village Pet Shop

Fisher-Price, \$19.99

Our testers had a wonderful time caring for the pets in this plastic play set: They bathed, fed, groomed them, and put them to sleep in the pet bed. This set includes a 3½-inch "girl," several pets, accessories, and a colorful house. Also available: Village Dress Shop, Mail Carrier Set, Police Officer Set, Dream Cruiser Convertible, and Village Vendor Set.

Why It Won: The many accessories and play pieces allowed for extended pretend play. Small hands can grasp and manipulate the pieces easily.

Ages We Recommend: 3-5

Assembly: Minimal **Batteries:** None

Product Information: 800-432-5437



Toy Safety Guidelines

BY ERIC TARNOW

A great toy must also be a safe toy. Reputable toy manufacturers know this, and long before your child ever gets her hands on a truck or a dollhouse, it has been tested for flammability and toxicity, and designed in such a way as to minimize potential danger from sharp edges and points. Toys must comply with federal government regulations, and most manufacturers also conform to a strict set of industry-generated voluntary standards.

Still, parents' knowledge and caution provide the best protection against the possible hazards of children's playthings. Here are guidelines to keep in mind:

Remember that age labeling relates not only to developmental levels but also to safety. All toys containing small parts and meant for chil-

dren aged three to six are required by law to carry the words "WARNING: CHOKING HAZARD—Small parts. Not for children under 3 years."

Before purchasing a toy, inspect it for potential safety hazards.

Long cords and strings can pose a strangulation hazard to very young children, who don't have the physical coordination to free themselves if they become entangled. Sharp points and edges can pose a danger, as can small openings in which a child might catch a finger or toe. And watch out for packaging materials: Once a toy or game is opened, properly dispose of any plastic bags, wire twists, nylon tag strings, staples, foam pellets, and the like.

Keep siblings in mind. A younger brother or sister should not have access to

an older child's toy that contains potentially hazardous components.

Take proper care of toys. Regularly check playthings for damage (such as loose, chipped, or cracked parts; sharp edges and points; splinters; loose seams) that could result in injury. Don't let children play with broken toys.

If you have any questions or concerns about the safety of a particular toy or game, contact the manufacturer or the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission, which provides a toll-free hot line, 800-638-CPSC, or, for the hearing impaired, 800-638-8270.

Eric Tarnow served as the director of product safety for Children's Television Workshop for 4½ years.

Big Bubble Machine

Fisher-Price, \$16.99

Bubbles have a magical quality that fascinates children. This bubble-making machine capitalizes on that interest by letting kids make enormous bubbles, stretch them into tubes, double them up, and surround them with even more bubbles. A built-in fan sends the creations into space.

Why It Won: The design of Big Bubble Machine promotes experimentation, creativity, and mastery. "Because the children had to figure out how to make larger and smaller bubbles, the toy was not only pleasing to watch but a mini physics lesson as well," explained the mother of four-year-old Valerie Bloom.

Things to Know: Kids as young as age two also enjoyed playing with the bubble maker. The bubble solution runs out quickly, so it's smart to have a supply on hand (either store-bought or homemade). Also, since this toy can create a mess indoors, you may want to limit its use to outdoors.

Ages We Recommend: 3-5

Assembly: None **Batteries:** 2 C

Product Information: 800-432-5437



My Pretty Dollhouse Enchanted Castles

Lewis Galoob Toys, \$18.99-\$39.99

These three enchanting castle-shaped dollhouses were a big hit with the girls. Each castle (Wishing Well, Rainbow, and Pink Swan) includes rooms of fanciful furniture, king and queen figures, their accompanying royal court, and a whimsical dragon and unicorn.

Why It Won: Many pieces and compartments and poseable figures make these play sets extremely appealing. Our testers spent hours arranging and rearranging the furniture and creating adventures with the characters.

Things to Know: Give your child a box in which to conveniently store all those little pieces.

Ages We Recommend: 4-7

Assembly: Moderate **Batteries:** None

Product Information: 800-4-GALOOB ►

4-5 Years Old



Other Noteworthy Toys of the Year

Some of the toys that excited us at the 1996 American International Toy Fair were not yet in production at the time of our testing. Here are five of our favorites:

Sesame Street's "What's My Letter?"

Fisher-Price, \$39.99, ages 3-6
Preschoolers' favorite game-show host, Guy Smiley, quizzes the *Sesame Street* gang in this electronic learning toy that teaches letter recognition and alphabet skills. It includes a letter wheel, a letter-selector dial, and six two-sided cards.

PRODUCT INFORMATION: 800-432-5437

Magic Touch Talking Books

Playskool, \$19.99, age 3 and up
Exciting learning activities are featured in this series of interactive books. Simply touch an illustration to activate up to 100 different sounds (16 to a page).

PRODUCT INFORMATION: 800-PLAYSKL

Talking Bus Sentence Maker

Mattel, \$47, age 3 and up
Kids can create over one million silly sentences in this play set—electronic talking toy, and then hear them played back as a little bus moves around a circular track.

PRODUCT INFORMATION: 800-524-TOYS

Dizzy Designer

Ohio Art, \$15.50, age 7 and up
Create wild designs with this motorized painting machine. Dizzy Designer comes with four foam brushes in different shapes and colors, three colors of water-soluble paint, three bags of glitter, four stencils, and ten sheets of art paper.

PRODUCT INFORMATION: 800-641-6226

Mrs. Fields Baking Factory

Yes! Entertainment, \$29.99, age 8 and up

In less than 20 minutes, kids can bake authentic Mrs. Fields cookies, brownies, and muffins. The toy comes complete with baking utensils, mixes, baking tips, muffin pan, and cookie and brownie pan. It also includes a coupon book worth savings of over \$10 at the Mrs. Fields stores.

PRODUCT INFORMATION:
800-222-9376

Smart Start Basic Plus

VTECH, \$21.99

Here's an enjoyable way for kids to learn letters, vocabulary, spelling, math, shapes, and colors: Put the lessons in a colorful, laptop computer-style electronic game. When children get the right answer, little animated astronauts get into their spaceship and take off. Twenty-five colorful two-sided activity cards will keep children busy for hours. And when your child needs a new challenge, more packs of cards can be purchased.

Why It Won: Kids found the toy challenging and entertaining. Progressively difficult levels of questions means that Smart Start Basic Plus can grow with your child

Ages We Recommend: 4-7

Assembly: None **Batteries:** 2 AA

Product Information: 800-521-2010



Cool Tools Automotive Race Car

Playskool, \$19.99

Budding mechanics can hone their skills by fixing and tuning up their own race car. The Cool Tools screwdriver can be used to take off (and put back on) the tires, fenders, hood, and various engine parts. Also included are a tire jack, toolbox, and gas can.

Why It Won: Kids can play with this toy the way they would with any toy car; however, they can also build it, decorate it with the enclosed stickers, fix it, race it, take it apart, and put it back together again. Our testers especially loved the look of the car and enjoyed the toolbox.

Ages We Recommend: 4-5

Assembly: None

Batteries: None

Product Information:
800-PLAYSKL

Glamour Hair Sue and Her Beauty Salon Too!

Goldberger Doll, \$50

"Taking care of her doll's hair made my daughter feel like a mommy. She never wanted to stop playing," said the mother of five-year-old Julie Perez. That about sums up the sentiment that most of the children had for this large-size hair-styling doll. She comes with everything needed for designing new hairdos: comb, curlers, blow-dryer, ribbons, and a beauty salon seat.

Why It Won: Our testers had a wonderful time using this doll's many accessories in fantasy play.

Ages We Recommend: 4-5

Assembly: Minimal **Batteries:** None

Product Information: 212-924-1194 ►



A

RE YOU WORRIED ABOUT GIVING YOUR KIDS MORE MEDICINE

SST-116

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relieve the combination of symptoms they have, without worrying about side effects from medicines they don't even need.

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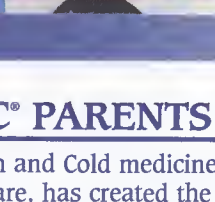
GIVE THEM...



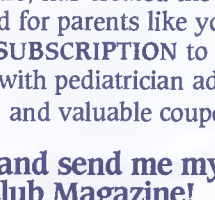
NASAL CONGESTION



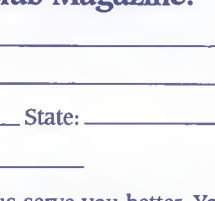
NASAL CONGESTION
AND COUGHING



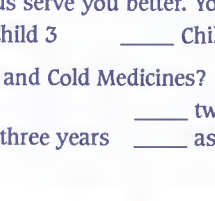
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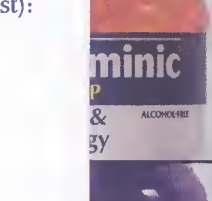
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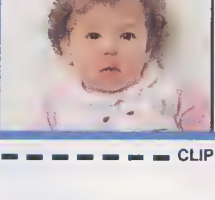
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AND COUGHING



SORE THROAT, FEVER
AND COUGHING



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NIGHT TIME COUGHING,
SNEEZING AND
RUNNY NOSE



INFANT
CONGESTION



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4-5 Years Old



Other Noteworthy Toys of the Year

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Sesame Street's "What's My Letter?"

Fisher-Price, Preschoolers' Guy Smiley, gang in this el teaches letter skills. It includ selector dial, PRODUCT INFO

Magic To Playskool, \$1 Exciting learn this series of i touch an illust different soun PRODUCT INFO

Talking B Mattel, \$47, a Kids can crea tences in this toy, and then l little bus move PRODUCT INFO

Dizzy De Ohio Art, \$15 Create wild d motorized pai Dizzy Designe foam brushes and colors, th soluble paint, stencils, and ten sheets of art paper. PRODUCT INFORMATION: 800-641-6226

Mrs. Fields Baking Factory

Yes! Entertainment, \$29.99, age 8 and up

In less than 20 minutes, kids can bake authentic Mrs. Fields cookies, brownies, and muffins. The toy comes complete with baking utensils, mixes, baking tips, muffin pan, and cookie and brownie pan. It also includes a coupon book worth savings of over \$10 at the Mrs. Fields stores.

PRODUCT INFORMATION:
800-222-9376

Smart Start Basic Plus

VTECH, \$21.99

Here's an enjoyable way for kids to learn letters, vocabu-

Cool Tools Automotive Race Car

Playskool, \$19.99

Budding mechanics can hone their skills by fixing and tuning up their own race car. The Cool Tools



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"Taking care of her doll's hair made my daughter feel like a mommy. She never wanted to stop playing," said the mother of five-year-old Julie Perez. That about sums up the sentiment that most of the children had for this large-size hair-styling doll. She comes with everything needed for designing new hairdos: comb, curlers, blow-dryer, ribbons, and a beauty salon seat.

Why It Won: Our testers had a wonderful time using this doll's many accessories in fantasy play.

Ages We Recommend: 4-5

Assembly: Minimal **Batteries:** None

Product Information: 212-924-1194 ►

A

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	NASAL CONGESTION AND DAYTIME COUGH	
	NASAL CONGESTION, RUNNY NOSE AND COUGHING	
	NASAL CONGESTION, RUNNY NOSE AND SNEEZING	
	NASAL CONGESTION, SORE THROAT, FEVER AND COUGHING	
	NASAL CONGESTION, NIGHT TIME COUGHING, SNEEZING AND RUNNY NOSE	
	INFANT CONGESTION	

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6-8 Years Old

K'NEX Wampus Read It/Build It Series

K'NEX, \$19.99

The folks at K'NEX have combined their highly successful color-coded snap-together construction pieces with charming storybooks that suggest objects and creatures kids can create and play with.

Why It Won: Even without the construction activity, the storybooks are delightful. Six- to eight-year-olds were able to make the suggested creations as well as their own, meaning they kept coming back to the toy. Wampus is portable and comes with a nifty storage bag; the pieces can be used with other K'NEX sets.

Ages We Recommend: 6-8

Assembly: None **Batteries:** None

Product Information: 800-KID-KNEX



World Book Learning Center by Tiger ED.

Tiger Electronics, \$99

"Wow! I can learn about the world and have fun at the same time," eight-year-old Morgan DeSena exclaimed. This electronic learning toy looks like a laptop computer. Sixty colorful double-sided cards provide information from the *World Book Encyclopedia* on topics ranging from history and geography to science and nature to inventions and mathematics. Children press buttons to answer various questions on the touch-sensitive electronic board. A 12-character LCD screen lets kids know if they're right or wrong.

Why It Won: This toy encourages critical thinking and boosts reading skills. When kids get the right answer, they feel great. The progressive levels of difficulty also mean this product can grow with your child. Parents appreciated the carrying handle, durable construction, and the learning the toy encouraged.

Ages We Recommend:

6 and up

Assembly: None

Batteries: 4 AA

Product Information:

847-913-8100

Henry

Tiger Electronics, \$20-\$25

This is an electronic-sound version of the old favorite, Concentration. Each time the game starts, over 75 sounds are shuffled and randomly placed under one of 16 different buttons. Press the "Henry" button, hear a sound, and then try to guess which other button triggers the sound. When you get it right, the button stays lit; four in a row wins the game.

Why It Won: What starts out as a game of chance soon turns into a challenging game of memory. Kids loved the sounds, which include a howling wolf, a train, crazy whistles, and amusing phrases (such as "Hey, watch it, pal!"). Our testers—and their parents—played repeatedly with Henry, either alone or with a partner.

Ages We Recommend: 6 and up

Assembly: None **Batteries:** 4 AA

Product Information: 847-913-8100



Dragon Flyz

Lewis Galoob Toys, \$11.99-\$12.99

Now boys have their own version of the popular Sky Dancers. This line of flying action figures with launchers, which includes one female, puts a new twist on an old theme.

Why It Won: Children loved the way these so-called warriors could be launched into the air, and played with them again and again. There's plenty of playtime in this toy, at a fairly low cost.

Ages We Recommend: 5 and up **Assembly:** None

Batteries: None **Product Information:** 800-4-GALOOB ►

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eating
this
for
my
HEALTH.”

You're happy it's wholegrain.
They're happy it's a whole bowl.
It's Life® Cereal.

You love it 'cause it is good.
They love it
'cause it tastes good.
That's Life.

Life is
made from
delicious
**WHOLEGRAIN
QUAKER
OATS.**



6-8 Years Old

Power Zone

Tyco, \$55

Kids can play five different action-packed games with this system. Awesome features, such as glow-in-the-dark discs, high-speed disc shooters, and electronic sounds, make these versions of shoot-a-disc-at-a-target really exciting.

Why It Won: The different games require different skills, giving Power Zone broad appeal to children at various developmental levels. Youngsters can play alone or with others, and the rules are simple to follow. Some of our testers even invented their own games.

Ages We Recommend: 6 and up

Assembly: Minimal **Batteries:** 3 AA

Product Information:
800-FOR-TYCO



Kodak for Kids Special-Effects Camera

Tyco, \$25

Children can create awesome visual effects with this innovative two-in-one camera: Just snap on the special-effects wheel and choose multi-image, triple image, softening, or starburst effects. The wheel detaches easily so kids can even use the camera, which takes 110 cartridge film, without the effects.

Why It Won: The pictures taken with this camera say it all! Kids had loads of fun experimenting and expressing themselves, and the results were worthy of framing. The easy-to-use camera is the right size for young hands, and a built-in flash allows for both indoor and outdoor shooting.

Ages We Recommend: 7 and up **Assembly:** None

Batteries: 2 AAA **Product Information:** 800-FOR-TYCO



PHOTOS OF AVA (TOP LEFT) AND ELSIE (RIGHT): KATIE DAVIDSON, TYCO



It's designed to detangle kids' hair as you shampoo, and do it better than other shampoos. It even helps...



Introducing Johnson's® Kids

Mega Mouth

Yes! Entertainment, \$12.99

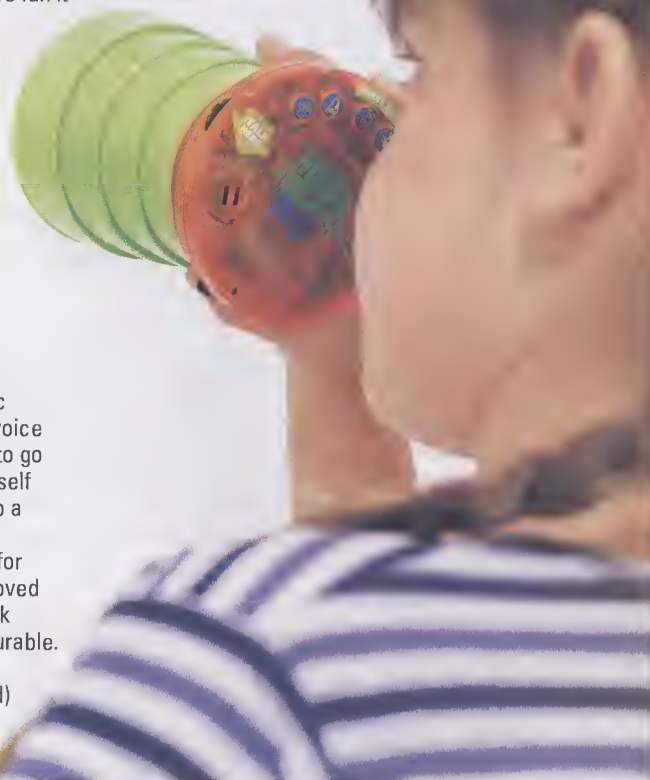
Kids can use this handheld collapsible microphone with sound effects to drive their parents crazy. "The more they annoyed other people, the more fun it was for them," said the parent of a seven-year-old boy.

Why It Won: True, this toy does nothing but warp voices. But kids really loved it, and parents and adults can really get a kick out of seeing children have a good time.

Things to Know: There is a volume control, although your child may try to hide that feature from you.

Ages We Recommend: 6-12 **Assembly:** None

Batteries: 3 AAA (included) **Product Information:** 800-222-9376



Yak Time

Yes! Entertainment, \$19.99

Say it, then play it. This brightly colored plastic watch talks back! Kids can record their own voice alarms or personalized memos, and set them to go off—in the middle of math class. The watch itself can be popped off its wristband and clipped to a backpack or pocket.

Why It Won: The digital readout made it easy for children to tell the time. But what they really loved were the cool-looking design and the playback recorder. The watch also seems to be fairly durable.

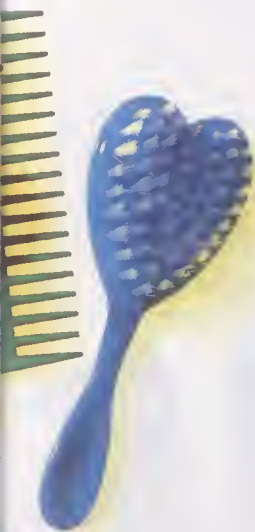
Ages We Recommend: 6-12

Assembly: None **Batteries:** 2 lithium (included)

Product Information: 800-222-9376 ►



You keep looking for
a new brush to
make detangling your
child's hair easier.
All you really need is a
new kind of shampoo.



prevent tangles between shampoos. Finally, there's a faster, easier way to detangle your child's hair.

No More Tangles™ Shampoo

6-8 Years Old



Creepy Crawlers Creature Creator Workshop; Creepy Crawlers Terrifying Tumblers mold pack

Toymax; Workshop, \$19.99; Tumblers, \$9.99

Kids can gross out adults by making disgustingly realistic bugs from plastic goop, which is put into molds and then baked in the included Creepy Crawler oven (heated by a light bulb). Throw the Terrifying Tumblers at the wall and they'll crawl down in slow bug-time.

Why It Won: The updated and redesigned oven in this classic toy comes with a new safety feature that prevents the oven door from opening until the bug-mold tray is cool. Also, the directions are easy to follow. This toy promotes creativity, fantasy play, and patience (it takes a while for the bugs to finish baking). Girls as well as boys liked making the bugs and got some good laughs from "frightening" others.

Things to Know: Even though the oven has a new safety feature, parents in our test felt more comfortable supervising children during the baking process. The metal trays are very hot if removed from the oven too soon.

Ages We Recommend: 8 and up

Assembly: Needs 60 watt light bulb **Batteries:** None

Product Information: 800-222-9060



Wee Enchanted Garden

Creativity for Kids, \$20

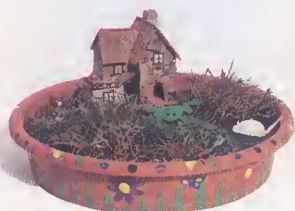
Budding gardeners can cultivate a tiny garden wonderland in a 10-inch plastic planter. The kit provides potting soil, seeds, paints, rocks, gravel, miniature woodland creatures, and a charming English cottage of carved bark. Kids provide water and TLC.

Why It Won: The plants grew really fast, so children had a sense of accomplishment. Kids also liked painting the pot, deciding where to plant the seeds, and how to landscape the garden. This toy helps youngsters learn how things grow and what gardening is all about.

Ages We Recommend: 6 and up

Assembly: None **Batteries:** None

Product Information: 800-642-2288



Radio Control 9.6 V Turbo Mutator

Tyco, \$80

Speed, style, stunts, great sound effects, and the ability to morph into five cool shapes made this radio-controlled car a huge hit. With the touch of a button, Mutator can change from a rocket racer into an amazing stunt machine. You can stop the morphing action at any point, so the car can have many different looks.

Why It Won: Kids found Mutator easy to manipulate and control. This car can be used indoors and outdoors, and repeated crashes didn't damage its body or wheels. Even better, walls or furniture also came away unscathed—a huge relief to parents—perhaps because the rubber tires are so large.

Ages We Recommend: 6 and up

Assembly: None **Batteries:** One 9 V; rechargeable battery pack

Product Information:

800-FOR-TYCO



Jazzy Jewelry Color Twists

Binney & Smith, \$14.99

Kids can design and create over 25 one-of-a-kind pieces of jewelry that they'll really want to wear. This kit features bendable art board, a versatile jewelry-making medium that can be shaped into a number of jazzy shapes after it's soaked in water. The nontoxic materials include 40 different precut jewelry shapes, 25 gemstones, and an assortment of acrylic paints, as well as necklace cords, barrettes, and earring and pin backings.

Why It Won: Several girls wore their creations to our play session, and, boy, were we impressed! The jewelry is truly attractive—very jazzy. This kit inspires creativity and imagination.

Things to Know: This kit is not for children who need instant gratification. They have to wait a half hour for the art board to soak in water before they can bend it, and then another 4 to 12 hours for it to harden before they can paint and assemble what they've made. Some parental supervision may be needed until kids get the hang of forming the jewelry into shapes.

Ages We Recommend: 7 and up **Assembly:** None

Batteries: None **Product Information:** 800-CRAYOLA ■



Dear Santa,



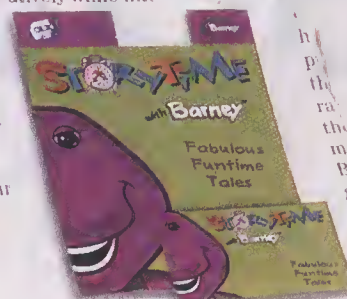
Includes the week of February
new episodes through
ends" returns with its



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The Feelings You Bring to the Table

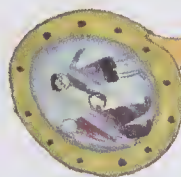
By Susan Schoenberger

Why you get so emotional about your child's eating habits, and what to do about it



During his toddler years, my son Andrew loved only one food, a spinach-ricotta pie that I used to make two,

three, even four at a time and keep in the freezer. Whenever I was at a loss for what to feed him, I would defrost a piece and he would shovel it into his mouth with both hands. Watching Andrew eat, I felt a small hum of satisfaction that grew into a kind of joy. Knowing I had fed him well—with spinach, no less!—carried me happily through the rest of the day. I had done my job, at least for the time being. ►





**No
more
tug of war.**



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Triple-action detangling spray.
Ideal for wet or dry hair.
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You, too, probably rejoice when your kids happily gobble up the dinner you've prepared. Likewise, it's easy to become upset, even angry, when your three-year-old turns her nose up at your newest culinary creation, or insists she no longer likes peas. Why are parents so emotional about feeding their kids? On a basic level, the satisfaction we get from watching our children eat fills a primal need all parents share—the need to feed our young. On a deeper level,

baby comes out of the womb, a mother feels a sense of completeness in feeding her child," says William Sears, M.D., the author of ten books on child rearing and the father of eight. The simple act of feeding can be very gratifying and even empowering. You alone are providing that infant with everything it needs to survive. In fact, the feelings of love and intimacy that come with feeding your baby may have a biological basis. A breast-feeding mother gets a dose of the



The *satisfaction* of watching our children eat fills a *primal need*.

food triggers feelings of happiness, stress, and acceptance that we carry over from childhood. As a result, says Ellyn Satter, a registered dietitian and the author of *Child of Mine: Feeding With Love and Good Sense* (Bull Publishing), parents who struggle with their own eating concerns find it especially difficult to relax when it comes to feeding their children.

THE LOVE CONNECTION

The food-feeling connection begins very early for all of us. "From the moment the

hormone prolactin each time she nurses, notes Dr. Sears, which relaxes her and provides an emotional high. Perhaps, he adds, some of the joy we take in watching our older children eat well is a natural extension of the way we felt in their early days.

Unfortunately, what starts out as a healthy and loving connection between parent and child can turn into the mistaken idea that food equals love. How does this happen? Most parents put a lot of effort into feeding their children, so it isn't surprising that you feel let down or rejected when your child

insists that he wants cookies instead of your casserole for dinner. The mistake many parents make, however, is equating their child's rejection of food with a rejection of themselves. "The underlying thought is, 'If you don't eat it, you don't love me,'" says Henry B. Biller, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of Rhode Island in Kingston.

Jody Kempf of Minneapolis found herself falling into that trap. Her five-year-old daughter Linnea is a finicky eater whose mealtime portfolio doesn't go much beyond eggs and peanut butter. This selective eating was troubling to Kempf: "My husband and I love to eat and cook interesting things, and it feels like punishment to us to have a child who won't even try what we prepare," says Kempf. "I keep asking myself, 'What did I do to make Linnea so picky?'" But picky eating is a natural stage for quite a few young children, Dr. Biller points out, and parents need to cope with this attitude, rather than feel guilty about it.

TABLE TURMOIL

To understand your own feelings about food, it pays to think back to your childhood. In your family, did you always have to clean your plate? Was dessert only given as a reward? "Much of our frustration with food relates to how we were raised," says Dr. Biller. "When we see food left on our children's plates, it often triggers a response that is based on what our parents taught us."

Combine those childhood memories with society's mixed messages about eating, and you have a food fight waiting to happen. "Food has become more than just fuel for a growing body," says Jane R. Hirschmann, a psychotherapist in New York City and coauthor of several books on eating and body image, including *Preventing Childhood Eating Problems* (Gurze Books). "Now, while we still connect food to growing, we also don't want our children to stray too far from the ideal body type—thin for girls, tall and muscular for boys." As a matter of fact, experts agree that food is connected to social acceptance in a way that wasn't an issue even earlier this century, when food choices were limited and different body types were more accepted.

Lisa Wilson of Wilmington, Delaware, a mother of three, understands the emotions that mealtimes can stir up. She was a chubby child, but she only partially blames genetics for that. In Wilson's family, the clean-plate policy was always in effect. "If I didn't eat everything on my plate, I felt guilty," she recalls. "We were always told that because



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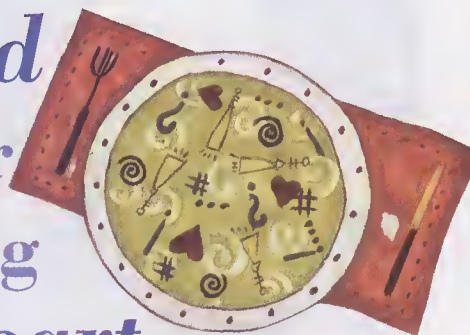
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Try to *avoid* taking your child's eating habits *to heart*.



there were other children who were starving, we had a responsibility to eat when we were served."

Now she worries that she is putting too much pressure on herself regarding her children's diet. Lisa particularly worries that her eight-year-old daughter Mallory, who has the heartiest appetite of the three, will become overweight. "I'm afraid she might have the same problem I had," she says. "I don't want her to go through what I did."

THE FATHER FACTOR

It may seem as if moms are the only ones worried about what their child is eating, but my own experience shows that's not so. Let's take another look at my son Andrew, now four years old. He's a wiry little guy who weighed 29 pounds on his fourth birthday, a good 10 pounds less than some of his peers. He's healthy, and his doctor isn't concerned about his weight. But my husband, Kevin, is.

Kevin is now 6 feet tall and weighs 190 pounds. As a child, though, he was short and skinny. "I was often the subject of the bigger kids' unwanted attention," he recalls. "And I was always picked last for kickball teams. It was emotionally draining."

Kevin has tried everything to get Andrew to eat—cajoling, rewarding, and demanding—but his tactics rarely work for long. These methods are potentially more than unsuccessful; Dr. Biller warns that a father's concern about a child's eating habits can have a downside, especially if that worry becomes too controlling. "In a lot of families, mealtime may be the only time Dad is there. Being overly concerned about what your child eats is a way for dads to be involved, but it's not a positive way."

All children, whatever their size, can manage to drive their parents crazy with their attitudes toward eating, but we tend to worry most about overweight daughters and thin sons, says Satter. Parents have to learn to trust their youngsters: No matter how

much or little they eat, research shows that over time the majority of children will eat a nutritionally adequate diet if it's available, Satter adds.

The key is to avoid taking your child's eating habits to heart. Small children are picky eaters for plenty of reasons. Most kids are neophobic, meaning they're frightened of novelty, and usually won't try a new food until they've been exposed to it several times.

If your child refuses to eat your lasagna the first time around, you may have to offer it two, three, or more times. Although this method isn't perfect, it does work: the more familiar a child becomes with a particular food, the more apt he is to try it eventually. Satter adds that kids also change their tastes, sometimes on a daily basis. Some children have a tendency to go on food jags, eating only one kind of food for days or weeks on end. All this is normal.

Satter advises parents to stay calm and never try to force a child to eat. "If you do, it will backfire," she cautions. "When parents are too controlling about eating, kids rebel—and reject the foods in question." A parent's job is simply to provide healthy meals and snacks for their children. "Once the food is on the table, your job is over," says Satter. "The rest is up to them."

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

You can encourage children to have a healthy attitude toward mealtimes by having a healthy attitude yourself, and by creating a positive atmosphere when you sit down together. Here are some tips from the experts to get you started:

Make mealtime fun. Dinner can be a pleasant experience if you focus the conversation on subjects other than what your child is eating.

Stop trying to control your children's food intake. Refrain from directing how much or what food should be eaten. Instead, encourage your kids to try new foods, but never force them to take "just one bite."

Disband the clean-plate club. Don't insist that your child eat everything. Instead, serve smaller portions and allow her to eat seconds (or thirds).

Don't hold dessert hostage. Avoid rewarding your children with dessert for finishing the main course. That immediately sends the message that dessert is better than the rest of the meal.

Get the kids to help. Encourage your child to assist as you plan meals and prepare them; he'll be more likely to enjoy a meal if he's helped.

Be a good role model. Show your children that you enjoy different kinds of food.

Watch what you say. Don't make comments that cause children to feel self-conscious about eating. ("Pie? Oh, I couldn't—it goes straight to my thighs.")

If we give our children a head start by teaching them to trust their instincts about food, they will be more likely to grow in a healthy way, with a positive attitude toward

eating. That means pushing aside the frustration, the anxiety, and the guilt that you may feel to find a kind of joy in food that you can share with your children. ■

Susan Schoenberger writes frequently for national publications. She has two children.

The Grandparent Test

Feeding your children in front of your parents or in-laws may be the toughest test of whether you can stick to your convictions about food.

Jody Kempf of Minneapolis doesn't force her kids to eat, and she knows her parents wonder why she doesn't. When they all eat together, she often hears her mother or father telling the kids, "Eat more vegetables, then you can have dessert."

When grandparents criticize the way a parent handles her children's eating, it pulls a lot of emotional strings, says Jane R. Hirschmann, a psychotherapist and coauthor of several books on eating. "It's like an assault on your parenting skills."

Hirschmann advises telling parents or in-laws that you understand their concerns, but that you have decided to allow your children more control over what they eat.

"Tell your parents, 'You may not agree with this,'" Hirschmann adds, "but we think it's working well.'"

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WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

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Now she worries that much pressure on herself. Lisa particularly eight-year-old daughter the heartiest appetite become overweight. "I don't have the same problem. I don't want her to go through

THE FATHER FACTOR

It may seem as if moms are worried about what their kids eat. But my own experience shows otherwise. Let's take another look at Kevin, now four years old. He's a healthy 29 pounds on his good 10 pounds less than he was. He's healthy, and his doctor is happy about his weight. But my

Kevin is now 6 feet tall and weighs 120 pounds. As a child, though, he was skinny. "I was often the smallest kid in the class," he says. "I was always picked last for sports. It was emotionally draining."

Kevin has tried everything to eat—cajoling, rewarding, punishing—but his tactics rarely

work. These methods are potentially more than unsuccessful; Dr. Biller warns that a father's concern about a child's eating habits can have a downside, especially if that worry becomes too controlling. "In a lot of families, mealtime may be the only time Dad is there. Being overly concerned about what your child eats is a way for dads to be involved, but it's not a positive way."

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"Tell your parents, 'You may not agree with this,'" Hirschmann adds, "but we think it's working well.'"



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Once upon a time I found cooking to be a relaxing experience. Whether slicing, dicing, blending, or steaming, I could lose myself for a short while. It didn't matter whether the dish was a crowd pleaser, I just enjoyed cooking.

Then I became a parent. In my daughter's first two years, when I wasn't waiting for a pizza delivery, I'd be worrying how to land anything home-made on the table and still keep a watchful eye on her and the time. Cooking was transformed from a pleasant pursuit into a furious race against potential disaster and a relentless clock.

Things got more complicated when Anna, barely two years old, started paying close attention to my work in the kitchen. "Can I help?" she'd ask so sweetly and so frequently that there was no way I could say no.

1. Anna found carrying an armful of produce to the kitchen counter quite the challenge. Pretending to be a circus juggler helps her balance the pile.



Someone's in the Kitchen With Mama

By Grace Bennett

What happens when a mom and a preschooler cook up a pizza together? Let's watch

In the two years since, I've been learning how to share the kitchen with Anna, and I've even found our collaboration to be fun and productive. And now that I have a baby on the way, who knows? Maybe Anna can be head chef some day, and her little sibling the chipper assistant, while I sit back and relax.

But for now Anna and I are the team in the kitchen. And while it can be a challenge to keep her busy with appropriate tasks, I've also learned that she *can* help.

So when *Sesame Street Parents* asked if they could document our experience of cooking together, I thought, "Sure, will you bring a cleanup crew, too?" We decided on making one of Anna's favorite foods: pizza, using a low-stress recipe that is perfect for little hands. Anna stood on her step stool and we got to work. To my—and the photographer's—relief, just a few spills later, the pizza was done. Anna sampled a piece and smiled. Ah, the joys of success! ▶



2. Oops! A yellow pepper took a tumble. No problem—Anna washes off the debris. I start chopping while she scrub-a-dub-dubs.

Grace Bennett lives in Chappaqua, New York, and writes **TH** for *Sesame Street Parents*.



3. With the veggies all washed, Anna preps the pizza tray, sprinkling cornmeal here and there. The dinner hour is fast approaching; I speed up the chopping.



4. Time to roll the dough—clearly, Anna's favorite part of the recipe. I'm careful to resist "fixing" what she creates. So what if the pizza's not a perfect rectangle?



6. Will my preschooler actually eat the fruits (or veggies) of her labor? We'll see. But this little chef certainly couldn't be prouder of her masterpiece.



everyone—artist. Arranging the "just so" takes a lot of concentration.

Preschooler's Pizza

SERVES 4

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon cornmeal
- 1 (10-ounce) tube refrigerated pizza dough
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup tomato sauce
- 1 red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and diced
- 3 button mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 1 cup broccoli florets, cut in $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch pieces
- 8 large kalamata olives, pitted and chopped
- 2 cups grated part-skim mozzarella
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F. Brush a 15" × 13" cookie sheet with olive oil, then let your child sprinkle on cornmeal. Help her roll pizza dough into a square by pushing dough out from the center with your fingers.

2. Spread sauce on the dough and decorate the pizza with vegetables, olives, grated cheese, and basil. Bake for 12–15 minutes or until crust is nicely browned.

Nutritional information per serving: 462 cal, 21 g fat, 7 g saturated fat, 41% cal from fat, 22 g protein, 46 g carbohydrates, 1,345 mg sodium, 33 mg cholesterol

—Jean Galton

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explains,

"I'll put an apron on her, set up a bowl of water and a brush, and hand her some zucchini and carrots to wash and scrub."

She also recommends setting your child up with paper and markers and asking him to make place mats. Then have him set the table with his creations.

Encourage watching. "No child under the age of seven should be allowed to use electrical equipment or any sharp utensil," says Marion Cunningham, the author of *Cooking With Children: 15 Lessons for Children* (Alfred A. Knopf). "But watching from a distance is a wonderful way for a preschooler to gain a sense of comfort in the kitchen."

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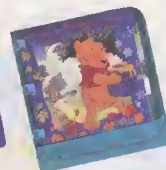


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ELECTION

'96

BY RONNI SANDROFF

Our readers speak out about family issues



AMERICANS WILL SOON GO TO THE POLLS TO choose the next president of the United States. Elections, of course, have a special meaning for parents of young children. We're not only voting for our own future but also choosing leaders whose actions will have long-lasting effects on our youngsters' lives.

Sesame Street Parents wanted to help our readers get the information you need about the election. So, as we did during the presidential election of 1992, we published a poll in the magazine, asking for your opinions on the most important family-oriented issues.

Included in our May 1996 issue was a two-page questionnaire, "Where Do You Stand on Family Issues?" Within three weeks of its publication, we received more than 4,000 responses, many of them accompanied by long and powerful letters. The split

between Republican and Democratic respondents was almost even (another 18 percent identified themselves as independents). We sent the polls to an independent research firm for tabulation, then asked journalist Ronni Sandroff to analyze the results and write the report you'll find below.

We also used your responses to develop the other features in this issue's special Election '96 section, including the analysis on page 52 of the records of Senator Bob Dole and President Bill Clinton. In addition, we sent the poll results to Senator Dole and President Clinton and asked them to respond to its findings;



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you'll find their statements, written exclusively for the readers of *Sesame Street Parents*, on page 54.

So, where do parents in the United States stand on the most important issues in this political year? Here's what 4,000 of you told us were your major concerns, and what you want done about them.

The readers of *Sesame Street Parents* spoke with a surprisingly unified voice about many topics. You want a no-nonsense government that protects your children and takes action against violence. You want stricter gun-control laws and community notification about convicted sex offenders.

But while you expect government help in some areas, you are wary of federal spending and government's intrusion on your private life. And you want some contradictory things accomplished: universal health care and more aid to education, but also lower taxes and a balanced budget.

Here are some of the issues on which our respondents were most united:

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT: 91.3 percent wanted to see stiffer sentences for violent criminals.

DAY CARE: 88.7 percent favor national standards for health, safety, and personnel in child care centers.

TAXES: 79.8 percent want the tax exemption for minors to be increased.

DRUG POLICY: 79.6 percent want the war on drugs to be stepped up.

FLEXITIME: 76.5 percent want flexible work schedules available to all parents.

HEALTH CARE: 76 percent want guaranteed health care for all Americans.

GUN CONTROL: 75.8 percent demand tougher gun-control laws.

EDUCATION: 75.2 percent want to see more money going toward public education.

THE DEFICIT: 74.3 percent believe a balanced budget is crucial.

You made it clear that you want kids to be the centerpiece, not an afterthought, of government policies and values. "Put more of our resources and efforts into caring for our children," writes Viola A. De

Wall of Richmond, California, echoing the views of many parents.

BIG WORRIES, TOUGH SOLUTIONS

Crime and violence have affected many of our respondents' lives. An alarming 44.3 percent reported that at least one of their family members had been a crime victim. There was surprisingly little difference in the experiences of those parents who had greater financial resources and lived in more affluent communities: Suburban and higher-income parents (earning over \$75,000 a year) were victims of crime at rates similar to those of parents from urban and lower-income homes (earning under \$30,000 a year).

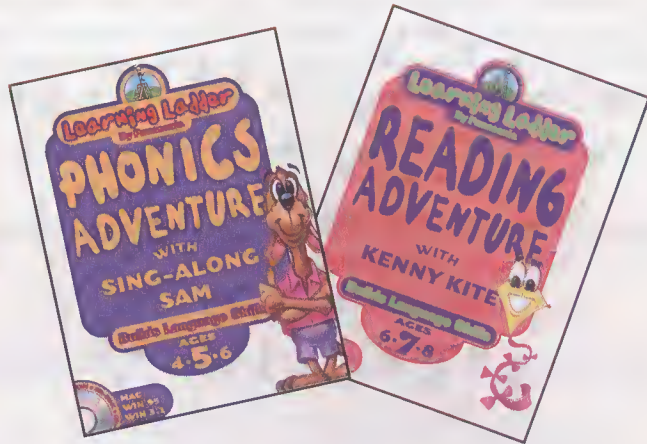
Most parents want tougher laws and harsher punishment for criminals. A whopping 90.9 percent of those polled support stronger laws to protect victims of domestic violence. "Men need to be given a strict lesson in zero domestic violence," writes one reader, who adds, "Male, and especially female, politicians should also speak out against pornography and sexual violence."

There were similarly high percentages in favor of prison terms without parole for violent criminals and notification of residents when a convicted sex offender moves into a neighborhood.

Not all were enthusiastic about the recently enacted notification law: One respondent felt that the police, schools, and day-care centers—not neighbors—should be the ones who are informed. And while some politicians characterize attempts to legislate tougher regulations for gun purchasing as unfairly restrictive of the rights of law-abiding citizens, 75.8 percent of our respondents supported stricter gun-control laws.

Should the approach to crime be one of prevention or punishment? **Over three quarters of the families polled view social programs for at-risk kids as a step in the right direction.** "Violent crime, drug abuse, and the crime associated

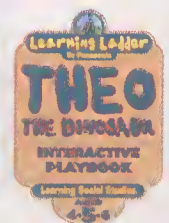
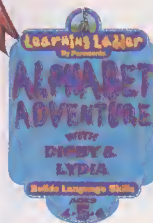
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with drugs will not be solved with more prisons," writes one reader. "We need to provide youth with real economic opportunities and break down the race and class barriers. Our 'war' on drugs should be waged at the level of education and opportunities."

On the issue of television violence, many parents are emphatic about controlling the problem through a federal rating system. "I have three small children, and it's hard to find appropriate shows," notes Valerie

Erickson, adding, "I know I can turn the channel, but what about the sleazy commercials?" Another mother wrote, "Children are often bombarded with violence, sex, ideas of rebelliousness, and many other immoral issues, which make them grow up much faster than they need to."

HELP FOR PARENTS WORKING OUTSIDE THE HOME

Nearly 89 percent of parents wanted the federal government to ensure that safety standards are upheld at child care centers. And many parents wanted government subsidies for child care, to make it more affordable and improve its quality. "As a pastor and mother of three young children, I see one of the biggest issues as being the lack of low-cost, quality day care," comments Rev. Cindy Loomis-Abell of Dayton, Ohio, who challenges the candidates to bring America up to the standards of the rest of the industrialized world in the sphere of government-funded day care.

"Being a full-time parent is the most important job anyone can do," asserts April E. Hughes Kaufman of Centerport, New York. "Many parents who would love to stay home and raise their children are not able to do so because it's financially impossible. We need incentives through health care, tax exemptions, and government-advocated corporate flextime schedules for parents with school-age children."

Yet while many poll respondents hope for more government funding for day-care centers, or hefty tax credits for dependent minors, others resent these ideas. "I stay at home with our children. I would feel penalized if day-care centers got more government money for taking care of children," writes one reader.

Another big issue for working parents is time off to deal with family emergencies. Seventeen percent of respondents said they had already taken advantage of the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act, which allows employees of relatively large companies to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave. The law seems to primarily benefit higher-income households, with more than twice as many of those earning over

GO CAROLING WITH SOME REALLY COLORFUL CHARACTERS.

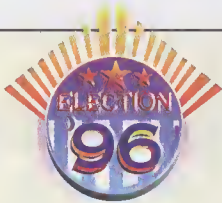


Now our fine-feathered, fun-loving gang is crooning its way through Christmas. So laugh, sing, and whoop it up to all your seasonal favorites. Look for our other music, videos and book & tapes.

CHILDREN'S
TELEVISION
WORKSHOP

SONY
WONDER

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\$75,000 a year taking a leave as compared with lower-income parents. Almost 30 percent of lower-income parents responding to the poll said they needed family leave but couldn't afford to take it.

THE ECONOMY AND GOVERNMENT DEBT

Nearly three out of four poll respondents consider balancing the federal budget to be crucial. In fact, after years of crushing national debt, parents seem determined to hand their children a country that is in good fiscal shape. "If I were to really [spend] beyond my means, I would be in major trouble," complains one reader. "Why is the government allowed to spend so extremely out of its means? What type of example does this set for citizens?"

In the area of our respondents' economic well-being, there were differences between the 1992 and 1996 *Sesame Street Parents* poll results. During the 1992 presidential campaigns, 31.3 percent of our respondents said they were worse off economically than they had been four years earlier; in 1996 only 22 percent said their economic status had worsened. That's not to say the majority of our respondents had made big economic advances by 1996; this year 44.7 percent reported that their economic status had stayed the same over the past four years. That number was 34.2 percent in 1992.

CONTROVERSY OVER WELFARE

In one of the poll's more intriguing findings, widespread resentment toward welfare mothers turned up from two very different types of middle-class moms: those who feel forced to stay home because of unaffordable day care, and those who want to stay home but feel they have to work.

A striking 63 percent of poll respondents told us they would support cutting welfare benefits. "I would love to have more children, but we can't afford to," says Kimberly Ross of Gardiner, Maine. "Why should welfare moms get to stay home with their kids?"

At the same time, we received letters from respondents who have been on public assistance: "Don't cut welfare," writes one Ohio mother who was on welfare for six months. Instead, "help people with child care so they can get off it."

MORE BUCKS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Your kids aren't in school yet, but you want more money to go to public education. A sizable majority of poll respondents (75.2 percent) want to see

SANTA'S NOT THE ONLY GUY WITH A FUZZY RED SUIT.



Be careful what you wish. That's what Elmo learns when Santa grants his wish to have Christmas every day. Put this new one-of-a-kind Christmas classic and all our videos, music and book & tapes under your tree.

CHILDREN'S
TELEVISION
WORKSHOP

SONY
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Milk Matters for Mothers-To-Be

Everyone knows calcium builds strong, dense bones and can help prevent osteoporosis later in life. Yet, as many as 90% of American women aren't getting enough calcium in their diets.

Calcium, important for a woman throughout her life, becomes particularly crucial around pregnancy. Preparing for pregnancy means getting your diet in good nutritional shape so you can meet the physical demands of the nine months ahead.

Mothers to be should drink more than three 8 oz. glasses of milk a day to meet the recommended daily requirement of 1200-1500 mg of calcium. Additionally, milk helps to provide the other eight essential nutrients that also contribute to a healthy pregnancy.

A potentially serious complication of pregnancy is called pre-eclampsia, which is also referred to as pregnancy-induced hypertension. Current research indicates that calcium intake during pregnancy may help protect against this serious condition.

So, whether you're just starting to think about having a baby or you're already pregnant, it's important to make milk a part of your daily routine.

Call 1-800-WHY-MILK,
for a brochure on why
milk is important for
mothers-to-be.



more funding for public schools. That's not because they think the schools are substandard; nearly 68 percent said they thought their public schools were good or excellent.

Most parents also support new national testing standards, the right to choose a public school, and increased funding for training in new technologies. A slim majority of parents (53.8 per-

JUST THE FACTS

Respondents to the poll who identified themselves as Republicans: **40.5%**

Those who identified themselves as Democrats: **36.8%**

Those who identified themselves as independents: **18.3%**

Those respondents who strongly agree or agree with the statement, "All United States citizens should be guaranteed health care": **76%**

Respondents who want to raise income taxes to pay for health care: **5.2%**

Those whose ideal candidate would favor strong environmental laws: **83.5%**

Those whose ideal candidate would tighten immigration laws: **79.5%**

Those whose ideal candidate would support capital punishment: **74.4%**

Those whose ideal candidate would support legalized abortion: **61.8%**

Parents who agree that family leave should be paid: **58.1%**

Those who disagree: **29%**

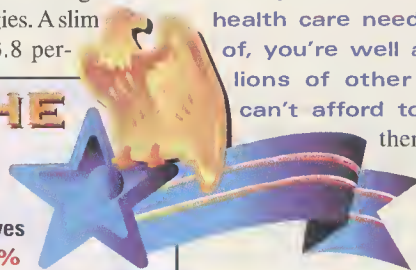
Respondents who say they consider it important that a candidate seems honest: **89.4%**

Respondents who chose "seems compassionate": **69.5%**

Respondents who chose "seems dedicated to his family": **67.1%**

Respondents who chose "is in good health": **49%**

Respondents who chose "has a sense of humor": **43.3%**



cent) favor vouchers for private- and parochial-school tuition. But others fear that federal aid to education often comes with strings attached. "Parents have the right to raise, discipline, and educate their own children. We don't need so-called experts from Washington telling us how to do it. It does not 'take a village,'" objects one reader from Indianapolis.

HEALTH CARE: THE NEED IS CLEAR, THE FINANCING ISN'T

Though most of you feel your health care needs are taken care of, you're well aware of the millions of other Americans who can't afford to foot the bill. "If

there is any message I would like to give the candidates, it would be the need for guaranteed, affordable health care for working folk," writes Tracey L. Holly, a registered nurse. "I have just learned that I am unexpectedly pregnant. We are without insurance. [Our country needs] health care not just for the people who aren't working but for us folks that are...contributing to society."

WHICH QUALITIES COUNT THE MOST?

Issues are clearly extremely important to voters, but we also asked readers to tell us about other factors they take into account. Our questionnaire listed 11 attributes that may be important in a leader. The top three characteristics that respondents wanted in a candidate were (in order) honesty, compassion, and dedication to family. These three received at least an 18-percent greater response than other qualities, including being in good health, being a good speaker, appearing presidential, and having an appropriate spouse.

Whatever the outcome of this year's vote, the results of our poll showed that parents want government to continue to put children and families at the top of the agenda—and not just during the election season. "We should identify the minimum that is acceptable for the children of the privileged and make that the standard for all children," writes Noreen M. Sugrue of Savoy, Illinois. "Do unto the children of others as you would have people do unto your own." ■

Ronni Sandroff writes frequently on political and women's issues. She lives in Dobbs Ferry, New York.

Show us your milk mustache and become a milk celebrity

ENTER THE FUJIFILM MILK MUSTACHE PHOTO CONTEST and your photo could be featured in a national magazine

plus you could win a Fujifilm Endeavor 300 camera and other great prizes

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on winning entry. Grand Prize subject to media space availability. Prizes won by minors will be awarded in the name of a parent or legal guardian. Contest and prizes subject to federal, state and local laws and regulations. Winners required to execute affidavit of eligibility/liability/publicity release that must be returned within 14 days of notification. Limit one prize per individual/household. **Judging:** Winners determined on or about 3/3/97 by a panel of judges under supervision of Marden-Kane, Inc. Winners selected based on Originality and Imagination (40 pts. max.); Artistic Execution (40 pts. max.); Appropriateness to Milk Mustache theme (20 pts. max.). Winners notified by mail. **Eligibility:** Contest open to amateur photographers who are legal residents of the U.S. only, except employees of the NFMPFB, Fuji Photo Film U.S.A., Inc., their affiliates, agencies, distributors, independent contractors or others engaged in the development of this contest, judges, Marden-Kane, Inc. and the immediate family members of the foregoing. Void where prohibited. Winners grant permission for use of their names and photographs/ likenesses, and entries for advertising and promotional purposes, without additional compensation, unless prohibited by law. Contest subject to complete rules. For complete rules, mail a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) by 12/31/96 (WA residents may omit return postage) to Fujifilm Milk Mustache Rules, P.O. Box 648, Sayreville, NJ 08871-0648. For list of major prize winners, mail a SASE by 3/15/97 to Fujifilm Milk Mustache Winners, P.O. Box 648, Sayreville, NJ 08871-0648.



Just send us a picture of you or your family or friends wearing milk mustaches, along with the entry form below and a proof-of-purchase of one gallon of milk. You can enter any or all of the following four categories: male adult, female adult, child (12 and under) or group (two or more people). If your photo is selected for a Grand Prize, we'll feature it in a national magazine and give you a Fujifilm Endeavor 300 camera. So drink your milk, get the nine essential ingredients your body needs every day and send us your milk mustache photo. You could be a winner in more ways than one.

Grand Prize: Winning photo in a national magazine ad, Fujifilm Endeavor 300 camera, 10 rolls of Fuji Film including processing. Retail value \$709. (One per category)

1st Prize: Fujifilm Endeavor 50 camera, 10 rolls of Fuji Film. Retail value \$149. (.25 per category)

2nd Prize: Fujicolor QuickSnap Plus camera. Retail value \$10. (.75 per category)

MILK
Where's your mustache?

GET FREE MILK NOW



OFFICIAL ENTRY FORM

Yes! If selected as a Grand Prize Winner, I'd like to have my Milk Mustache photo featured in a national magazine.

Please enter this photograph in the following category (check one):
☐ female adult, ☐ male adult, ☐ child (12 and under), ☐ group (two or more people).

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Telephone _____

To enter (read rules for complete details): 1. Take a photograph of an individual or group wearing a milk mustache. 2. Check entry category. 3. Complete this form. 4. Attach this form to back of entry photograph (8"x10" or smaller) and enclose in envelope along with an original dated cash register receipt showing store name and address for purchase of one gallon of milk (or its equivalent), any variety. (No purchase required in AZ, FL, KS, MD, MN, WI, VT.) For each entry, please mail separately and enclose proof-of-purchase. Mail to: Fujifilm Milk Mustache Photo Contest, P.O. Box 8061, Grand Rapids, MN 55745-8061. Entries must be received by 1/31/97, subject to official rules.

MILK
Where's your mustache?

Manufacturer's Coupon / Expires 1/31/97

FREE half gallon of Milk

with purchase of Fuji Film 3-pack or QuickSnap Camera and a gallon of milk

Retail price of milk \$ _____ (up to \$1.49 in value)

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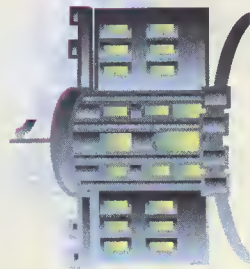
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LET'S LOOK AT THE RECORD

B Y D O R I A N F R I E D M A N



This year children took center stage in U.S. politics. Throughout the presidential campaign, both major-party candidates have stressed how much they want to do for the American family in the future.

But what have Bill Clinton and Bob Dole already achieved for families in the United States? Sesame Street Parents wanted to help our readers find out. So we asked Dorian Friedman, a veteran political reporter and researcher at U.S. News & World Report, to take a nonpartisan look at each candidate's record on the issues. We asked Friedman, who did the same job for us four years ago, to use the results of our political poll as her guide. Below is her report.



**PRESIDENT
BILL CLINTON**



**SENATOR
BOB DOLE**

"It is neither fair nor necessary to ask working Americans to choose between their jobs and their families.... This legislation... is long overdue."

—February 1993

★ President Clinton signed the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, a bill vetoed twice by his predecessor, George Bush. Under the act, workers in mid-size to large firms may take up to 12 weeks of unpaid time off for family emergencies or to care for a new baby.

★ In June 1996 President Clinton unveiled Family Leave II, a proposal to give parents another 24 hours' time off over the course of a year to handle routine family responsibilities. If passed by Congress, the plan would cover all workers.

"[Child care] is an important problem for millions of American families, but there are different ways to [solve it. I prefer] tax credits so that parents could make the decision [without] some mandate from the government." —June 1989

★ As a U.S. senator from Kansas, Bob Dole voted against the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, in favor of having states and individual employers offer such programs voluntarily. He said he supported the measure's intent, but worried that a federal mandate would induce businesses to curb other employee benefits.

★ Dole led the fight in the Senate against a big bipartisan child care bill in 1989. In 1990 he supported providing the states with block grants to help working families pay for child care, and letting parents use the aid to send their kids to private child care centers.

CHILD
CARE
AND
FAMILY
LEAVE

CRIME AND VIOLENCE

"One of the reasons I sought [the presidency] was to sign this anticrime bill], because if the American people do not feel safe on their streets...then it is difficult to say that the American people are free." —September 1994

★ President Clinton's record is one of backing crime-prevention efforts as much as crime-punishment measures. The centerpiece of his crime-fighting strategy was the 1994 law that provided for 100,000 more police on the streets, banned many assault weapons, funded more prisons, and contained a three-strikes-and-you're-out plan that forces repeat violent felons behind bars for life.

★ President Clinton lobbied vigorously for, and later signed, the 1993 Brady bill, which imposes a waiting period on all would-be handgun buyers.

★ Earlier this year he signed a measure requiring authorities to notify communities when convicted sex offenders are released from prison. He has asked the Attorney General to set up a national registry to track convicted sex offenders.

THE ECONOMY, THE BUDGET, AND TAXES

"Our economy is the healthiest it has been in three decades...[but] too many of our fellow citizens are working harder just to keep up, and they are rightly concerned about the security of their families." —January 1996

★ President Clinton has sent Congress a plan to balance the federal budget by 2002; he did not endorse efforts to pass a Constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget.

★ In 1993 he worked with Congress on an agreement that produced the biggest budget cut in U.S. history. It slashed the deficit by half in three years.

★ The President has backed a tax credit of \$300 to \$500 per child for families earning up to \$75,000 yearly. In 1993 he pushed for an expansion of a program that boosted the pay of 15 million families with incomes under \$27,000.

EDUCATION

"I challenge our parents to become their children's first teachers, turn off the TV, see that the homework is done....No program, no teacher, no one else can do that for you." —January 1996

★ As governor, Bill Clinton helped boost Arkansas's academic standards and increased teachers' pay. As President, he pushed Congress to enact Goals 2000, an initiative that would fund efforts to raise academic achievement.

★ Clinton has supported efforts to give parents greater choice over their children's education, but will not allow them to use government aid to pay for private or parochial schools.

★ He brokered an agreement with television executives to air at least three hours a week of educational programming for children.

HEALTH CARE

"I still believe our country has got to move toward providing health security for every American family." —January 1995

★ In 1993 President Clinton proposed an ambitious plan to mandate health insurance for every American. It died in Congress. He has since supported more modest reforms, which were just signed into law.

★ Recently, President Clinton took action to restrict cigarette advertising to minors, and to crack down on retailers who sell tobacco to children.

"In the good old days, we worried about the victim more than the criminals. We've had a period where we worry more about the criminal than the victims. But now...we're getting our priorities right again." —July 1996

★ Dole has favored tough crime-fighting measures over preventive strategies, voting for longer sentences and no parole for violent felons. He supported the death penalty, and legislation he introduced this year would, in some cases, subject violent felons as young as age 16 to capital punishment.

★ Senator Dole voted against President Clinton's major anticrime initiative, as well as the Brady bill. His alternative: An instant, computerized criminal background check for gun buyers.

★ This year Dole and several colleagues proposed legislation to ensure that youngsters who commit violent federal crimes are tried as adults, and to pay bonuses to states that stiffened penalties for young offenders.

"The way to get America back on the...fast track to growth and prosperity starts with letting families keep more of what they earn." —June 1996

★ For years Dole has been a leading supporter of deficit reduction. In his last important vote as Senate majority leader, he pushed (unsuccessfully) for a Constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget.

★ In August Dole backed a plan that would give a \$500-per-child tax credit to families earning up to \$10,000 per year, and announced that as president he would cut personal income tax rates for all taxpayers by 15 percent.

"Once, our schools were places of learning and order....[But] many parents today view our public schools as hostile to their own deepest values....That is why I favor the most sweeping reforms, beginning with the principle of school choice." —May 1996

★ Dole wants to close down the U.S. Department of Education and hand some of its functions back to states and local districts. He voted against Goals 2000, saying he wanted to reduce federal interference in education policy.

★ An advocate of parental choice in education, Dole supports vouchers that would allow parents to send their kids to any school, public or private. He backed President Reagan's plan to give tuition tax credits to parents with children in private and parochial schools.

"We know that America has the best health care system in the world...and our goal should be to ensure that every American has access to this system." —January 1994

★ Dole coauthored a Republican alternative to the Clinton health plan that gave people with preexisting illnesses the chance to buy insurance. The Republican plan did not pass, but Congress recently approved a similar measure, which Dole backed before resigning from the Senate.

★ Dole prefers tax incentives over government mandates to ensure health-care coverage. He pushed efforts to give self-employed workers tax breaks for their health costs, and lobbied for tax-free medical savings accounts, which families could use to pay for their own medical care.

★ A champion of the disabled, Dole was a lead author of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, a landmark law expanding the rights of the disabled.

IF ELECTED,

In our opinion poll, "Where Do You Stand on Family Issues?" [May 1996], we asked readers to tell us about their major concerns. Then we asked the candidates to tell us how, if elected, they will address these issues, requiring them to keep their responses to no more than 750 words. Below are the answers, written exclusively for Sesame Street Parents and edited, with the candidates' approval, only to meet the word requirement.

STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON

I BELIEVE OUR NUMBER-ONE CHALLENGE as Americans is to cherish our children and strengthen our families. By investing in education, reducing crime, preserving the environment, providing tax relief to working families, and encouraging companies to adopt family-friendly practices, my administration is protecting our children and our families.

We are providing parents with the tools they need to protect and care for their children. By winning passage of Megan's law, my administration is requiring police officers to notify residents when a convicted sex offender moves into their community. We are empowering parents to monitor what their children watch on television by requiring the V-chip in all new televisions. We have secured commitments from the broadcasting industry to institute a voluntary ratings system and to broadcast at least three hours of educational programming each week.

THE ECONOMY AND TAX RELIEF

Working families need

support to get ahead in the new economy. That's why I expanded the earned-income tax credit, providing tax relief to 15 million families, so hard-working parents do not have to raise their children in poverty. I signed the Family and Medical Leave Act, which allows working Americans to care for sick family members without fear of losing their jobs. I will continue to fight to balance the budget, while protecting Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment. My administration's economic policies have cut the deficit by more than half, and our growing economy has responded by creating 10.2 million new jobs. Our nation has the lowest combined rate of unemployment, inflation, and mortgage rates in 27 years.

HEALTH CARE Healthy families are vital to our children and our nation. I support health care reform that gives working people the opportunity to buy health insurance that they do not lose if they change jobs or if someone in their family gets sick. We are helping to build a healthier nation by asking the tobacco industry to stop marketing tobacco directly to children, and by implementing new scientific inspection procedures for meat, poultry, and seafood.

THE ENVIRONMENT We have an obligation to leave our environment safe and clean for the next generation. My administration has expanded the Community Right to Know program, which requires industries to tell people what substances are being released into the air and water. We are working to cut toxic air pollution from chemical plants by 90 percent by 1997. Under the Superfund program, we have cleaned up more toxic-waste sites in the last 3 years than in

the previous 12 years. We have ordered stricter meat safety tests that will dramatically reduce the chance of children eating a hamburger containing lethal E. coli bacteria.

EDUCATION My administration will continue to increase access to education for more Americans to help prepare them for the challenges and opportunities of the next century. I have increased Head Start funding to provide early education to tens of thousands of additional children in need, and I am committed to funding one million Head Start opportunities by the year 2002. My Goals 2000 initiative challenges schools to adopt national standards of excellence and to measure whether their students are meeting them. We are working to connect every classroom in the United States to the information superhighway by the year 2000. Our national service initiative, AmeriCorps, has given 45,000 young people the opportunity to earn money for college by serving their communities. To help widen the doors to college for as many of our young people as possible, I have proposed college tuition tax deductions of up to \$10,000 per family and \$1,500 per student.

FIGHTING CRIME AND VIOLENCE My administration is making families safe by securing our neighborhoods against crime. My crime bill is adding 100,000 police officers to our nation's streets. I fought for and signed the Brady bill, which has already prevented over 60,000 people with criminal records from buying guns, and the assault weapons ban, which is keeping 19 kinds of assault weapons out of the hands of violent gangs.

IMMIGRATION While America is a nation of immigrants, it is also a nation of laws. I have taken a strong stand to protect our borders. We must also honor all those immigrants who are working hard to become new citizens. I support a pro-family and pro-work legal-immigration policy that makes naturalization easier for those eligible for citizenship.

Families are the foundation of American life. I will continue to govern on the side of working families because stronger families will help build a stronger nation. ■



"My administration is protecting children and families."

I WILL...



The candidates respond to our readers' views

STATEMENT BY SENATOR BOB DOLE

AS ONE WHO HAS WITNESSED THE GREATNESS of America firsthand, I want to lead our nation to an even brighter future by reining in the federal government, reconnecting government to our most basic values, and reasserting America's influence abroad. The United States must confront key issues if we are to move forward—issues that I have made centerpieces of my campaign.

FIGHTING CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Although the murder rate took a modest dip last year, the total crime rate is about as high as it has ever been in our country's history, and twice what it was only 30 years ago. It is both heartbreaking and terrifying that our young people comprise the fastest-growing category of criminals. Over the past decade juvenile crime has increased by 60 percent.

I have been a consistent supporter of the death penalty, and support the abolition of parole for violent offenders. I believe that teenagers who commit violent crimes should be prosecuted as adults. I support tough mandatory penalties for those who use a gun while committing a crime. I have been a leader in the effort to combat violence against women, and a strong supporter of the innovative Police Corps program.

As president, I will provide the American people with the crime-fighting leadership we so desperately need. I will work with the governors to abolish parole for violent offenders and keep hardened criminals behind bars, and make the war on drugs a top national priority. And I will appoint federal judges who are tough on crime and criminals.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY LEGISLATION

I support making labor laws more family-friendly by giving today's working parents the flexibility to juggle work and family. Available options could include comp time with a 240-hour leave bank, flexible scheduling that gives employees the option to make

3-day weekends a part of their regular work schedule, and partial-day leaves of absence for both salaried and hourly workers.

EDUCATION If we are to improve our schools, we must never forget that quality education for our children depends on parents and local communities, not the heavy hand of Washington bureaucrats. Offering school choice and returning education decisions to the local level will restore accountability to our schools and reinvigorate American education. To encourage more choice for families, I have proposed a \$5 billion Opportunity Scholarships for Children initiative. This will establish scholarships for elementary-school children (at least \$1,000) and high-school students (\$1,500) to attend public or private schools.

THE ECONOMY AND TAX RELIEF

We must increase economic opportunity for all Americans by adopting policies that promote jobs and economic growth. This requires balancing the federal budget by cutting wasteful government spending; lowering taxes on working families to encourage savings and investment in job-creating activities; and curtailing burdensome federal regulations that are hobbling the U.S. economy. I also favor a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, to force the federal government to live within its means.

I support tax relief for families and fundamental tax reform because I understand that people know how to spend their own money better than the federal government does. As president, I will cut personal income tax rates by 15 percent; lower the capital gains tax to 14 percent to stimulate saving and investment; provide a \$500-per-child tax credit to low- and middle-income families, along with a new educational investment account with tax-free earnings for college education; and expand

individual retirement accounts and establish a spousal IRA.

HEALTH CARE Losing medical insurance coverage or facing obstacles to obtaining such coverage is a very real concern for many Americans. We need health insurance reform, but the answer is not a federal government takeover of health care. I support choice and portability of medical insurance. Self-employed individuals should get the same tax deductions as large corporations when buying health insurance. Medical savings accounts should be a real option available to all Americans. I support legislation to accomplish these goals.

I am committed to protecting, improving, and strengthening Medicare for current and future generations. President Clinton's administration has recently told him that Medicare will be bankrupt by the year 2001. I believe we must act now to save it. The latest Republican proposal will allow Medicare to grow at more than twice the rate of inflation, while guaranteeing that the program will be available to future generations. I support giving Medicare beneficiaries the right to choose the coverage that best meets their priorities and needs. I also support appointment of a bipartisan commission to recommend longer-range solutions. ■



"I want to lead our nation to an even brighter future."

Games big kids can play with little sibs

YOUR NEW BABY

BY MARY ARRIGO

Fun for Two

FROM THE MOMENT MY DAUGHTER Lucy was born, her sister Kate, then 2½ years old, was madly in love. Kate wanted to hold Lucy, kiss her, and, of course, play with her. It was a challenge to channel all of Kate's boisterous and sometimes overwhelming enthusiasm into activities that Lucy could also enjoy. But then I found the solution: games that worked for both girls' developmental levels. Here are some of the great games I discovered, which should be a hit with your big and little ones, too.

BIRTH TO 6 MONTHS

FUNNY FACE For reasons no one really understands, babies as young as one month will imitate facial expressions, says Marilyn Segal, Ph.D., dean of the Family and School Center at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and the author of the *Your Child at Play* book series (Newmarket Press). So have your older child sit with you, take turns making silly faces, and wait for your baby to copy what you do. The baby's funny expressions will delight a toddler or preschooler.

RATTLING AROUND

Here's a classic parent-infant game you can adapt so siblings can participate, too. Show your older child how to hold a colorful rattle about 8 inches away from your baby's face, the distance at which newborns can focus best. Have your child shake the rattle gently

while moving it back and forth in front of the baby. As your baby follows it with her eyes, she is learning to associate an object with the sound it makes, says Dr. Segal. And big sib will feel very important and grown up because he can make the baby do something interesting.

6 TO 12 MONTHS

A NEW PEEKABOO At this age, when babies are beginning to learn that objects (and people) exist even when they're out of sight, the game peekaboo offers both reassurance and a delightful surprise.

Shari Steelsmith, the author of *Peekaboo and Other Games to Play With Your Baby* (Parenting Press), suggests that the older child can vary this game so it goes beyond the old hide-the-face-behind-the-hands routine. The big kid can, for instance, hide a small stuffed toy under the baby's blanket and then pop it out. Again, the older child will feel a real sense of accomplishment because he can entertain the baby.

FILL AND SPILL Have your older child fill a pot, an empty oatmeal box, or any lightweight empty container with soft or plastic blocks. Then, says Steelsmith, hand it to the baby and

show her how to dump it out. When the container is empty, the older child can fill it and the baby can spill it once again. While your little one is honing her hand coordination, Dr. Segal notes, your preschooler will have a fine time making a mess.

12 MONTHS TO 2 YEARS

READ TO ME Preschoolers love to "read" their favorite picture books, comments Steelsmith, and babies enjoy sitting and looking at pictures. So invite the older sibling to tell the story of her favorite book and point to the pages while baby watches.

EARTHQUAKE Save up single-serving cereal boxes for this simple stacking game, suggests Sandi Dexter, the author of *Joyful Play With Toddlers: Recipes for Fun With Odds and Ends* (Parenting Press). Tape the top of the empty boxes shut and let the kids take turns stacking the boxes one on top of the other, counting as each one is added, to see how many can be piled up before they all fall down. While your younger child practices counting, the older one is actually getting a good lesson in spatial relations, Dr. Segal points out.

Siblings may not always want to play with each other. But even a few minutes a day can be an exhilarating and bonding experience for the two of them. ■

Mary Arrigo, a freelance writer in Huntington, New York, is the mother of a six-year-old, a three-year-old, and a one-year-old.



Big brothers and sisters love teaching little siblings new tricks.

Play It Safe

Whenever your big and little kids play together, take the following safety precautions, says Joel Bass, M.D., director of ambulatory pediatrics at Columbia Metro West Medical Center in Framingham, Massachusetts, and chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Injury and Poison Prevention.

- **Supervise their play.** Young children don't know when they're doing something that might frighten or endanger a baby.
- **Show your older child how to touch the baby.** Make it an unbreakable rule that if the younger sibling starts to cry, the game stops.
- **Provide a safe play area.** The surface should be soft enough to cushion a fall.



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Coping strategies for families with twins, triplets, and more

YOUR NEW BABY

BY LEE LUSARDI CONNOR

Multiple Blessings



cuss who's going to do what. Betty Rothbart, the author of *Multiple Blessings: From Pregnancy Through Childhood, a Guide for Parents of Twins, Triplets, or More* (Hearst Books), says that grocery shopping and laundry (a daily chore for families with multiple babies) are easy-to-accomplish tasks for dads who work outside the home during the day. Dad can also spend time with the babies' older sibling, who will need lots of attention as she adjusts.

Go one on one. Schedule time alone with each child. It doesn't have to be anything fancy. For instance, Dad can watch the twins while Mom takes the other sibling on errands. That way each parent can be alone with each child.

Take care of your marriage. The demands of children are a strain on any marriage, but for parents of multiples the stresses are, well, multiplied. "Be aware of the effect of fatigue on your relationship," says Rothbart. "When parents aren't getting enough sleep, tempers are often short and feelings can get frazzled very quickly."

Parents of multiples are also prey to a "shift mentality," Rothbart says. "Because there's so much to do in the first few years, it may seem practical to say, 'You do this, and I'll do that.'" But if you're on shifts all the time, she warns, you may lose track of each other. So take the kids for a walk together. If you can't swing a night out, at least set aside an evening to call for takeout after the kids are asleep. Eat it by candlelight, and catch up with each other.

Get lots of help. Surprisingly, many mothers of multiples feel reluctant to ask for the help they need. "Some people get into a rut thinking it's easier to do everything themselves," says Rothbart. New moms who spent years battling infertility may be especially

"I'VE FOUND ANOTHER heartbeat," the ultrasound technician said. "It's twins!" My husband gasped while I wept tears of joy—and terror. *Twins!* Would they be premature? Would they be healthy? And how in the world would we ever deal with two babies at once?



Increasing numbers of expectant parents are getting the news that they're having twins, triplets, quads, or quints. Improved fertility drugs and techniques, advances in prenatal care, and delayed pregnancies (women between the ages of 30 and 40 are more likely to produce multiple eggs) have all led to more multiple births in the United States. In fact, there's been a 2 percent jump in the multiple-birth ratio every year from 1980 to 1994 (the last year for which figures are available).

In my case, my first children were twins. But things can be more complex when you have other children at home. So if you're expecting (or have just delivered) more than one bundle of joy, here are some tips.

Get good prenatal care. Although most mothers and babies do fine, says Victor Klein, M.D., an obstetrician affiliated with North Shore University Hospital in Manhasset, New York, about 20 percent of all twins, and nearly all other multiples, are born prematurely, and thus potentially subject to serious health risks. A small percentage of women who are pregnant with multiples will lose the pregnancy or deliver premature babies with hearing, vision, developmental, or other problems. Dr. Klein, who specializes in high-risk pregnancies, advises women who are expecting multiples to get expert care and to watch their nutrition.



Involve your older child. He can be a big help right from the beginning. Inform him in advance about the multiples. While you're pregnant, your older child can make individual name plaques for the babies' cribs (which he'll fill in as soon as they're born). After their birth, set a schedule in which he's "in charge" of one twin one day, and of the other the next. For instance, if he's in charge of number one, he can entertain that baby while you change number two.

Be sure Dad plays a part. Fathers need to be part of the equation when twins enter your life. Take the time to dis-

Hiring a Sitter

Parents of multiples need to screen baby-sitters very carefully, warns Betty Rothbart, an expert on multiples, because people may tell you they'd love to care for more than one baby, only to flee once they really get a taste of it.

So be sure to ask multiple-specific questions, such as: "What if one of the kids grabbed a jar of strawberry jam and smashed it on the floor? She has jam all over her, there's broken glass, and you've got two other toddlers to keep away from it. What would you do?"

Ideally, your candidate would say something like, "I'd put the other two in the playpen, or their high chairs, where I could keep an eye on them while I cleaned up the first one. Then I'd put that child with the other two while I cleaned up the glass." Bonus points if she adds, "I'd make sure the strawberry jam is never left where a toddler could reach it!"

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Continued YOUR NEW BABY

reluctant to cede any maternal territory (and baby-sitters cost money, too).

Still, it's critical that you arrange to give yourself breaks. Start with free help—family, friends, neighbors. Next, look for child care leads, advises Maureen Boyle, executive director of Mothers of Supertwins (MOST), a national organization for families of triplets or more, based in Brentwood, New York. Boyle, who is the mother of triplets, enlisted volunteers from her church's senior citizens group and hired preteens from her church's youth group and the local Girl Scouts to provide extra sets of hands while she was around.

Learn to cope with unwanted comments. Parents of multiples and their babies are subject to stares and questions from strangers wherever they go. You'll hear comments like, "Triple trouble!" or "Two for the price of one!" And then there's the all-time least favorite question, "Did you use fertility drugs?" (Boyle answers that one with another question: "Why, are you having trouble conceiving?" That way she can give information or hope to someone who really needs it, while derailing the questioner who's just nosy.)

Try to let unpleasant encounters roll off your back. "For every person who says, 'Better you than me,' there's one who'll say, 'You have really been blessed,'" Boyle says.

Join a mothers-of-multiples group. Such groups are popping up all over the country; if your doctor can't direct you to one, call the National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs for a referral to the support group nearest you [see "Multiple Resources," at right]. Group members can be your best source of advice and support, particularly parents of multiples who are three to six months older than your own, says Lois Gallmeyer, executive secretary of the organization. "They'll be in the best position to remember and give you tips for the exact stage you're going through," Gallmeyer says. If your multiples have an older sibling, be sure to take her with you to one of the group's family functions so she can see she isn't alone in this situation, Gallmeyer advises.

Just do your best. Janet Bleyl, founder of The Triplet Connection, a Stock-

ton, California-based national support and information network for families who have or are expecting triplets, quads, or more, says she always hears mothers of multiples exclaiming, "There's not enough of me to go around!" The trick is to take care of each child as best you can, as quickly as you can. "You learn to do the most important thing first, and that babies don't die if they have to wait five minutes to get their diapers changed," Bleyl says.

Having multiple babies is a challenge, no doubt about it. But now that my twins are the ripe old age of four, I can truthfully say that each stage gets easier and easier. More important, the sheer fun and specialness of having twins is something I wouldn't miss for the world. ■

Lee Lusardi Connor is the mother of four-year-old twins. She writes frequently on family issues.

The trick is to take care of each child as best you can.

Multiple Resources

A number of organizations offer information and help to parents of multiples. Here are a few:

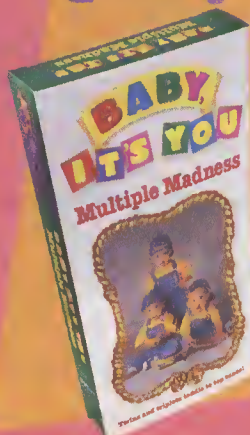
Mothers of Supertwins (MOST), P.O. Box 951, Brentwood, NY 11717-0627; 516-434-MOST; E-mail at mostmom@NYC.pipeline.com

National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs, P.O. Box 23188, Albuquerque, NM 87192-1188; 800-243-2276

Twin Services, P.O. Box 10066, Berkeley, CA 94709; 510-524-0863; E-mail at TwinServ@aol.com; web site can be reached through [ParentsPlace.com](http://www.ParentsPlace.com) at <http://www.ParentsPlace.com/>

The Triplet Connection, P.O. Box 99571, Stockton, CA 95209; 209-474-0885; E-mail at triplets@inreach.com; web site can be reached at <http://www.inreach.com/triplets>

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The benefits of baby massage

YOUR NEW BABY

BY ANTONIA VAN DER MEER

The Magic Touch

BABIES NEED MORE THAN simple nourishment to thrive; they also need your loving touch. Even if you didn't try infant massage with your first child, you might want to check it out this time around. You may find that it benefits you and your baby.

Massage helps calm fussy, colicky babies, according to ongoing studies at the University of Miami School of Medicine's Touch Research Institute. It also helps children sleep better. In addition, massage has been shown to benefit premature infants. "Those who were regularly massaged gained almost fifty percent more weight and left the hospital six days earlier than other premature babies," notes Tiffany Field, Ph.D., professor of pediatrics, psychology, and psychiatry, and director of the institute.

Baby massage also helps parents feel less anxious. "Daily massage gives parents permission to touch their babies and allows them to overcome feelings of worry about the baby being fragile," says Amelia D. Auckett, former nurse-in-charge at the Maternal and Child Health Centers in the Shire of Flinders, Australia, and the author of *Baby Massage* (Newmarket Press).

The daily massage should take about 10 to 20 minutes, depending on the baby's age. Pick a time when you're relaxed, advises Dr. Field, because any anxiety or tension that you may be feeling will be felt by the baby. And make sure your baby is fed, well rested, and in a good mood, so he will learn to associate massage with comfort.

HOW TO GIVE A MASSAGE

To begin, choose a quiet room. Take off your jewelry and wash your hands; rub your hands together to warm them. Undress your



Caressing your baby's legs (top right) and chest (above) are two of the soothing ingredients of baby massage.

baby, place him on his back on a towel or cloth diaper on the floor, and kneel beside him. Or place him in your lap, his head toward your feet. Then:

Using a circular motion, stroke the crown of your baby's head with one hand. Next, use two hands to caress the head, moving down along the sides of the face. With your fingertips, lightly stroke the forehead, the area below the eyes, and the temples; stroke down the sides of the nose to the corners of the mouth and then behind the ears (start at the top of each and follow the shape).

Lightly stroke your baby's neck. Move gently from the ears to the shoulders, from the chin to the chest, and then from the neck to the tops of the arms. Then stroke smoothly down the arms from the shoulders to the fingertips.

Gently stroke your infant's chest. Move both of your hands from the center of the chest outward to the sides of the body. Using your fingertips, gently massage the

tummy with clockwise circles. (Be careful to do this only after the umbilical cord stump has fallen off.)

Massage his legs. Using two hands, squeeze gently from the thigh of each leg down to the ankle. Massage the ankle; with your thumb, massage the foot from heel to toe. End with a long, light body stroke from the neck down to the toes.

Now massage your baby's back. Turn him over in your lap or hold him against your chest. Using your fingers and the palm of your hand, move down the crown of the head toward the neck. With one or two fingers, stroke the muscles at the base of the neck in a gentle circular motion. Next, move down to your child's shoulders and lightly massage them.

Stroke his back with the palm of your hand. Move gently from the neck to the end of the buttocks. Never put any pressure on the spine itself. Next, work your way down the legs, using long strokes that run from the top of the thighs to the tips of your baby's toes.

Finish with several full-body strokes. Sweep your hands from the head down the back and legs to the toes. Do this a few times before turning the baby over, wrapping him in a receiving blanket, and holding him for a quiet cuddle.

When you perform baby massage, employing the correct technique is certainly desirable, but, Auckett says, "the most important ingredient is love." ■

Antonia van der Meer is the author of *Great Beginnings: An Illustrated Guide to You and Your Baby's First Year* (Dell).

How kids learn to cope with the scary things in life

THROUGH THE YEARS

EDITED BY KATHERINE ROSS

**A GUIDE TO
DEVELOPMENT**

66 BIRTH TO TWO
by James M. Herzog, M.D.

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by Charles Flatter, Ed.D.

69 SIX TO ELEVEN
by Phyllis Tyson, Ph.D.

Fears



FEAR IS A NATURAL REACTION TO DANGER. EVEN THE TINIEST INFANTS jump at noises. By the time a child reaches school age, he has figured out from TV and newspapers that scary things really do happen, even if they are not what he once imagined them to be. Growing up involves mastering inner fears and coping with the real dangers the world presents. Throughout childhood, parents can provide the comfort and reassurance their children need ►

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Fears THROUGH THE YEARS

Birth to Two

BY JAMES M. HERZOG, M.D.

IN THE EARLY MONTHS A baby is generally kept safe from fear. His mother holds him close to her body when she nurses him, and her enveloping presence serves to make him feel protected as much as it nourishes him.

Being a baby is almost like being in paradise. But because it's paradise, there's sure to be a serpent.

The first time the serpent rears its head is when the child is about eight months old. By this age, one face (usually, the mother's) has become more familiar to the baby than any other. His ability to recognize this face is a source of great joy for him. But the flip side of the familiarity is fear: being confronted with someone who is not his mother causes him distress.

The fear is not of the unknown person, but that his beloved mother is lost to him forever. With this experience of loss, the child can no longer feel completely safe and sheltered. Over the next few months the baby learns that just because he sees someone

in his mother's place does not mean that his mother is gone for good. He comes to understand that she will be restored to him, and his fear is eased. Paradise, though briefly lost, is then regained.

THE SCARY WORLD

When the child is between one and two years of age, a new fear emerges. This time, unfamiliar situations—a fear of the outside world—are the issue. Of course, some toddlers are cautious by nature (researchers estimate that about one in every ten children is born with such a temperament), and they frequently react fearfully to something that is unknown. For most children, though, whether or not they experience fear in a new situation depends on the signals they get from their parents.

If a parent communicates by word or facial expression that an object or a situation is safe, the child will act as if it is, even when he has serious reservations. But if the parent indicates that danger is lurking, the child will become



When she sees a new face, a baby worries that she will lose her mother.

fearful and retreat even when no actual danger exists. In one well-known experiment, babies were able to overcome their reservations and crawl over what appeared to be a cliff (an illusion researchers had created with a table and a sheet of Plexiglass) simply because their mothers smiled at them when they were hesitating at the edge of the "cliff."

READING YOUR SIGNALS

Children's attitudes toward the world in general and new situations in particular can be shaped dramatically by their parents' feelings. This phenomenon, known as emotional referencing, happens quite commonly in everyday life. With a worried look, a parent says "Stop" or "Be careful,"

and a toddler stops or else advances cautiously. A smile means "Don't be afraid," and he goes ahead. In this way, parents teach their children a great deal about the world, without ever saying a word.

The first fears we experience are the fear of losing our most beloved person and the fear that the external world is dangerous. These are also, in a way, the models for all the fears that we will experience as adults. In the first two years of a child's life, he begins the struggle for control over the outside world—and over his own mysterious inner self. ►

Dr. James M. Herzog is senior scholar in child psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and a practicing child and adult psychiatrist.

KEEP IN MIND

- Newborns may be afraid of loud or sudden noises. By holding a baby close, parents can make him feel safe and protected.
- At about age eight months your infant may become fearful when he sees a stranger's face. This stage doesn't last long: Soon he will understand that just because a stranger is nearby doesn't mean his mother has disappeared forever.
- It's common for children between one and two years of age to be fearful of new situations. However, if parents communicate with words and facial expressions that they feel their child is safe, the less timid he will be.

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your pediatrician for the correct dose for your baby.



Two to Five

BY CHARLES FLATTER, E.D.D.

GAINING INDEPENDENCE and winning out over fear are two of a child's major tasks during the preschool years—and they are related. As a child develops a new, positive sense

a new baby-sitter to having a new furniture arrangement in the living room. And fear can be expressed in a variety of ways, ranging from great distress over seemingly insignificant bruises to



More independence can lead to new worries, such as a fear of the dark.

of independence, she is also laying the groundwork for new kinds of fears. Now that a child comes to understand that her parents can no longer control her, she also grasps that they can no longer protect her. As she experiences for the first time what it really is to be alone, she can no longer feel completely safe, and she becomes afraid.

Preschoolers may become fearful of the dark or wary of strangers and animals. They may become afraid of unfamiliar situations, which can include anything from having

resistance to toilet teaching to a preoccupation with thoughts of their parents' death (which often trouble five- and six-year-olds).

THE GREAT UNKNOWN

What is the common theme running through these seemingly unrelated fears? They all signify unknown, and thus potentially dangerous, situations in which the child believes herself to be alone and abandoned, helpless and vulnerable.

Of course these feelings are not conscious ones. For instance, if you were to ask your three-year-old to explain why he is suddenly afraid to go to bed at night, or your four-year-old why he flinches when he hears a dog bark, he wouldn't be able to explain—not even if he had a better grasp of language. These deep-seated fears represent his internal, not external, reality. This is why it is almost impossible to talk a child out of them.

You can, however, help your child become less afraid. Soothing words or gentle hugs at bedtime almost always have a comforting effect, particularly with three- and four-

year-olds. Just make sure that when you hold or caress her, you do it in a way that is reassuring. If you hold her too tightly, you may give her the

message that she really does have something to worry about.

Be mindful, too, that a young child's anxieties are sometimes stirred up by older children who may tell him scary stories. So if your preschooler suddenly begins to act unusually fearful, see if a sibling or friend at school has had a hand in it.

HELPING KIDS COPE

When children reach the age of five or six, fairy tales and fantasies can be helpful in reducing fears. From the fairy tales of the brothers Grimm to a number of current films, the central drama often concerns a child who ultimately triumphs over powerful, malevolent forces. Through these narratives, children get to participate vicariously in their own worst nightmares and, by identifying with the resourceful young hero or heroine, emerge victorious.

As children mature psychologically and physically, they learn from experience what is actually possible or likely to happen. They can use language as a tool for understanding not only external reality but also the workings of their inner world; once fears are spoken, they lose some of their power. So children become less vulnerable to the irrational. While understanding that the distance between themselves and their parents can never really be eliminated and that they are essentially alone in the world, children identify with their favorite superheroes and begin to become masters—not of the universe, but of themselves.

KEEP IN MIND...

- Three- and four-year-olds often become distressed when they have a tiny cut or bruise. Five- and six-year-olds may become preoccupied with thoughts about the death of their parents. At these times, hold your child, but not too tightly. You want to reassure her, not act as if something really is wrong.
- You can help your child conquer her fears by reading her stories about children overcoming evil forces. These tales allow your child to experience vicariously her worst nightmares; in the end she, too, will feel triumphant.

Dr. Charles Flatter is professor of human development at the University of Maryland at College Park Institute for Child Study.

Fears THROUGH THE YEARS

Six to Eleven

BY PHYLLIS TYSON, PH.D.

THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL years, children gain a greater understanding of the world. They use their experiences and increasing capacity for rational thought to deal with their fears.

TWO TYPES OF FEAR

There are two main types of fear that school-age children may experience, though the aspects of each vary from one child to the next. The first type of fear, which is an internal one, is a reaction to something the child thinks might happen; the second type, which is reality-based, is a reaction to a present event in light of something that happened in the past.

KEEP IN MIND

- Because school-age children pick up on their parents' feelings, be discreet. If you are anxious about something new that your child is undertaking, try not to convey that to her.
- Six- to eleven-year-olds understand enough to realize that the world can be a scary place. Helping them work out strategies to avoid feeling threatened, and discussing ways to cope if a feared event actually occurs, will make them feel more secure.

Here's an example of an inner fear at work: A seven-year-old girl is invited to sleep over at a friend's house. At first she's excited; school-age children typically love these forays into the outside world. But the child's mother is anxious about how her daughter will do in unfamiliar surroundings. With some hesitation, she finally allows her child to go. Near midnight on the night of the sleepover, the friend's mother phones to say that the

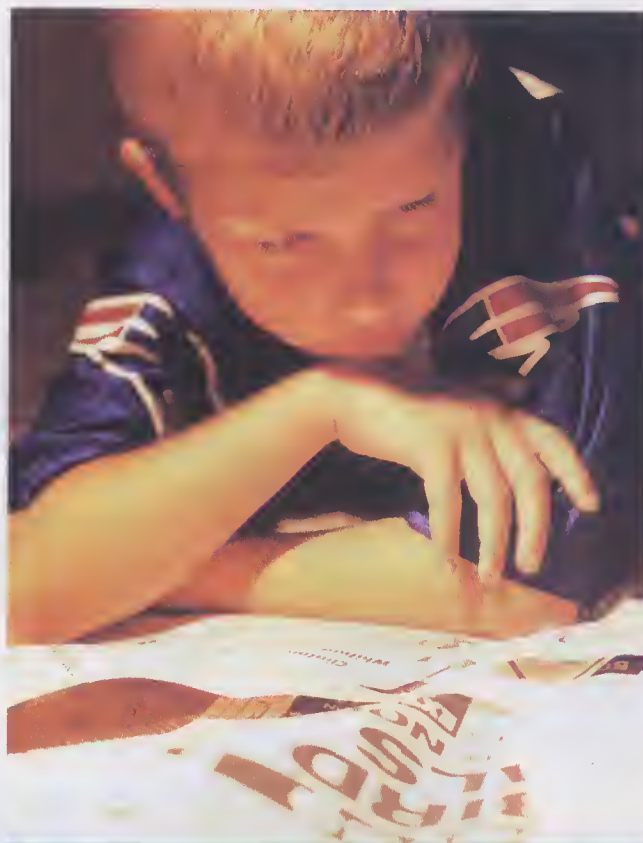
child wants to return home.

Why didn't the child enjoy the visit? It may seem at first that she was afraid to be away from home, but that really wasn't the reason. Children pick up on their parents' feelings and this girl, in fact, had "caught" her mother's anxiety.

Without realizing it, parents may communicate their own anxieties to their children, making it hard for the youngsters to enjoy their independence. Of course, parents don't mean any harm, but it is important for them to guard against communicating fearfulness to their children.

Sometimes inner fears are considered to be irrational phobias, which are common in

children of this age. A child who has not had any negative experiences with dogs but is frightened of them may be investing the animals with other negative or ambivalent feelings he has. Of course, he does this unconsciously; the child has no idea why he is afraid of dogs, he just knows he is. Fortunately, these kinds of fears tend to diminish gradually, and usually by the time a child reaches adolescence, they have disappeared.



Events in the news can give rise to new fears in school-age children.

Reality-based fears are very different. By now a child is old enough to have had some scary experiences, and a particular fear often may be traced to an actual event in his life.

The likelihood of past experience giving rise to new fears depends on many factors, such as the child's temperament and personal history. But if a child shows a sudden, unexplained fear, look for connections to frightening events in the past. A young child often quickly forgets a traumatic event. But even though the event is buried, it is still in his unconscious memory. Once his parents discuss the connection between past and present with him, the child is most often able to overcome his fear.

NORMAL FEARS

Children this age may also become fearful because of tragic events they hear reported on the news. Parents cannot always shield their children from scary events and reality-

based fears; what they *can* do is acknowledge a child's feelings and discuss them openly with her. For instance, if a child worries about being threatened or assaulted on the street, parents should give practical suggestions about how to feel safe (like walking with a friend), as well as suggestions for the child to follow if something bad does take place. Also reassure her that many of the things we fear actually are unlikely to happen.

Having fears is normal, and acknowledging, understanding, and learning to deal with them is part of a youngster's continuing development. A parent will notice that the more powerful and capable a school-age child becomes, the better able he will be to leave his childhood fears behind him. ■

Dr. Phyllis Tyson is associate clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California at San Diego and is in private practice in La Jolla.



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The Internet can link you to your loved ones

FAMILY COMPUTING

BY CAROL ORLOCK

Families On-line

OUR FAMILY USED TO BE VERY close before everyone married and moved all over the country," says Florence Tallman, who has three sons and five grandchildren. So when one son signed her up for E-mail, she immediately saw its family-friendly possibilities.

Within three months Tallman organized the family's first reunion. "We made all the reservations for hotels and Disney World on-line," she says.

The Tallmans are among thousands of families discovering that on-line communications can bring them closer. Whether separated by state boundaries or international borders, families today are going on-line to diminish distances.

GOOD-BYE TELEPHONE, HELLO INTERNET

When it comes to communicating with loved ones, E-mail is just the beginning. Nora Bernstein, the mother of a 22-month-old daughter in Ligonier, Pennsylvania, and her far-flung family have discovered Internet Relay Chat (IRC).

This service, provided by many on-line companies, allows family members to meet in an Internet "chat room" and conduct typed conversations. "My parents get all the latest news about what the baby is doing," says Bernstein, "and it doesn't cost a penny more than our monthly connection fee." Those savings add up quickly for Bernstein, whose parents live in Venezuela.

New technology is even making it possible to have telephone conversations on the Internet. With the right software, such as VocalTec's *Internet Phone* or Quarterdeck's *WebTalk* (about \$50 each), and a fast enough computer and modem, you can actually talk instead of type! The sound quality more closely resembles that of a walkie-talkie than a fiber-optic connection, but new and improved software should be available soon. For another \$149 or more for Internet video-conferencing software and a camera,

you can put a video camera on top of your monitor, turning your computer into a videophone. (Keep in mind that lower-price cameras will give you a grainy, choppy picture.)

PICTURE YOURSELF AT HOME

Virtual family reunions are the goal of many families employing yet another Internet tool, the World Wide Web. Using its graphic capabilities, families post "home pages" so that friends and relatives using Web-browsing software can see photos and get the latest household news.

Cindy Johns of Lima, Ohio, created a home page and posted pictures of her children for relatives to see. "They enjoy being able to jump to the site and see the pictures whenever they want to," Johns reports.

Another home page had an even more unexpected and dramatic effect on the life of Cherry Roberts of San Jose, California. An adoptee, Roberts had searched for her birth family for 20 years. In 1996 she finally received a letter from a sister who had been conducting her own search; the sister had found Cherry, in part, by using Internet resources.

After that, Cherry learned of a Web home page belonging to a brother. "I stared at the picture on his page," she says. "For the first time I saw another face that looked like mine." Two weeks later, family members, including Roberts's birth mother, met for a joyful reunion. Now the family uses the Internet almost daily to keep in touch.

For families like these, the Internet has gone beyond what scientists and scholars are fond of calling the global brain. It is fast becoming a global heart. ■

Carol Orlock has written about computers and children for a number of magazines and on-line sites.



Getting Connected

Here's how you can use the Internet to get your family together:

• E-MAIL AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB

To use these services, you need a computer, a modem, and an Internet access provider, which you can find listed in the Yellow Pages under "On-line Services."

• **INTERNET RELAY CHAT (IRC)** Call your Internet provider to see whether it supplies this service. Most do.

• **INTERNET TELEPHONE** Check out your local computer store for the latest software. Mentioned here: *Internet Phone* (VocalTec, 201-768-9400; \$49); *WebTalk* (Quarterdeck, 800-282-0866; \$49.95).

• **VIDEO CONFERENCING** You'll need video-conferencing software and camera setups on both ends. With *Enhanced CU-SeeMe* software (White Pine Software, 800-241-7463; Windows/Mac; \$99), you will also need a camera, such as *QuickCam* (Connectix, \$90) or *Color QuickCam* (Connectix, \$200). *Video-Phone* (Connectix, \$149) includes both camera and software.

• **HOME PAGES ON THE WEB** The major commercial on-line services have tutorials to help you set up home pages. Or try out the "Create a Homepage" option (a fill-in-the-blanks form) at The-Inter.net's "WWW Homepage Creation Center."

Address: <http://www.nauticom.net/www/future21/html.html>



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Answers to parents' medical questions **YOUR CHILD'S HEALTH** BY THE SPECIALISTS OF JOHNS HOPKINS CHILDREN'S CENTER EDITED BY JO MARTIN

PREMATURE PUBERTY

Q My six-year-old daughter has started growing pubic hair. Is this a cause for concern?

A In most cases, the early appearance of pubic hair does not indicate a serious problem. However, it is important for the child to be evaluated by a physician.

Girls don't usually develop pubic hair or breasts until they

are between the ages of 8 and 13. A girl under the age of eight or a boy under the age of nine who develops signs of sexual maturity has what is known as precocious puberty. The cause of this condition is unknown in the majority of cases. If early pubic hair is the only sign of puberty, your child may simply require close monitoring by her doctor to watch for any other signs of abnormal hormonal

development, such as a dramatic growth spurt or the development of breasts.

If other signs are present, your child may be referred to a pediatric endocrinologist (a specialist in children's hormonal development), who may perform lab tests to determine if there is a hormonal imbalance. If the tests are positive, and the doctor feels that the imbalance will interfere with your daughter's healthy development, he may prescribe a course of

monthly synthetic-hormone injections, which will arrest her premature sexual maturation. At puberty, she will be taken off the medication.

Lindy Lord

Registered nurse

Leslie Plotnick, M.D.

Associate professor of pediatrics

The following questions were answered by Bernard Cohen, M.D., director of pediatric dermatology.

KERATOSIS PILARIS

Q My son has been diagnosed with a skin condition known as keratosis pilaris. Will it ever go away?

A Keratosis pilaris, an inherited skin condition that causes a sandpaperlike rash on the upper arms, thighs, and cheeks, does tend to improve with age. Because the rash usually worsens in cold, dry weather, it is important to keep the skin moisturized, particularly in the winter, to help prevent the scaling that leads to the rash.

Ask the Doctors
Send your questions, including your child's age, to Your Child's Health, SSP, One Lincoln Plaza, New York, NY 10023. E-mail questions to sspletters@aol.com, or fax them to 212-875-6105.

We regret that letters cannot be answered individually.



Your child's doctor may prescribe a mild peeling agent containing alpha-hydroxy acids or urea to peel away the scale and prevent the rash. In more severe cases, she may recommend a stronger agent containing tretinoin, benzoyl peroxide, or high-concentration alpha-hydroxy acids.

MOLES

Q My seven-month-old daughter was born with pencil-eraser-size moles on her left hip and ankle. Since then, she's developed a mole behind her right knee. Our pediatrician is not worried, but a dermatologist we consulted believes they should be removed. Whose advice is correct?

A The answer lies somewhere in between. A serious type of skin cancer, known as malignant melanoma, can develop in moles. Although there is some evidence that the risk of melanoma is greater in birthmark moles than in moles that develop later in life, the overall chance that these moles will become cancerous is still extremely low.

As a result, routine removal of small moles that have been present from birth is not recommended for children by most pediatric dermatologists. Removal can usually be delayed until adolescence, when the procedure may include a local anesthetic. At that age, the child can be made aware of the problem and participate in the decision-making process.

Don't forget that all moles, whether they are present at birth or develop later in life,

should be observed for unusual or rapid changes in color, borders, texture, or sensation. Your child's doctor and dermatologist can determine if a skin biopsy is necessary.

FIFTH DISEASE

Q My friend's six-year-old daughter has fifth disease. Is it contagious? What are the symptoms?

A Fifth disease is a rash caused by human parvovirus B19. The name of the condition derives from an era when infectious rashes were numbered (the other four, in number order, were measles, German measles, scarlet fever, and a variant of scarlet fever).

The symptoms of the disease include a red "slapped cheek" appearance on the face, as well as red lacelike patches on the chest, stomach, and extremities. Less common symptoms include fever and achy joints (these are more common in adolescents and adults). Although the rash usually fades over two to three weeks, spots may recur for up to three months, especially after the child takes a hot bath or participates in vigorous physical activity.

Fifth disease, which is spread to others through coughing and sneezing, requires no treatment. There is no need to keep your child home from school or day care, because by the time the rash appears, the infection is no longer contagious. ■

A note to our readers: The information in Your Child's Health is general and cannot take the place of the advice of a health care practitioner who is familiar with your child.

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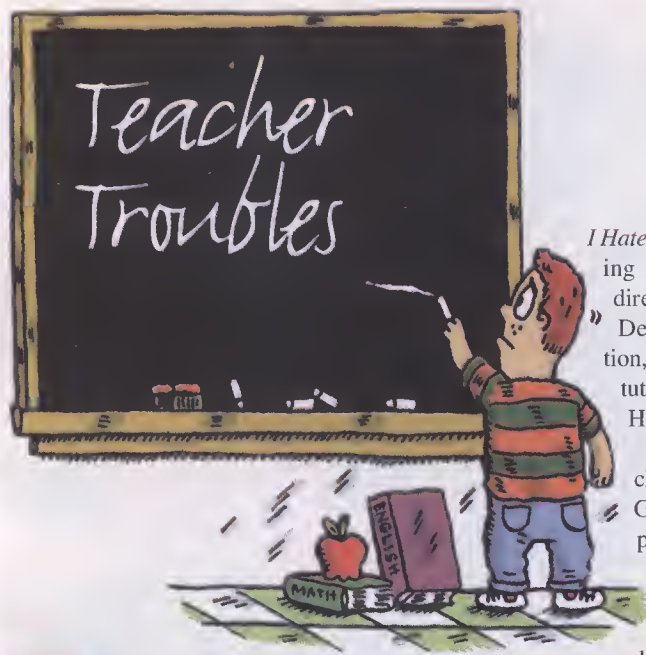
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ELEMENTARY YEARS

BY SUSAN YOUNGWOOD



I Hate School (Modern Learning Press) and executive director of the Society for Developmental Education, a teacher-training institute in Peterborough, New Hampshire.

Start by talking to your child about the problem, Grant suggests, and then perhaps to his classmates and their parents. You may find that the difficulty lies in one of several

situations: A teacher may assign too much homework, yell too often, play favorites, or pick on the child. Or your child's learning style may simply be incompatible with the teacher's teaching style.

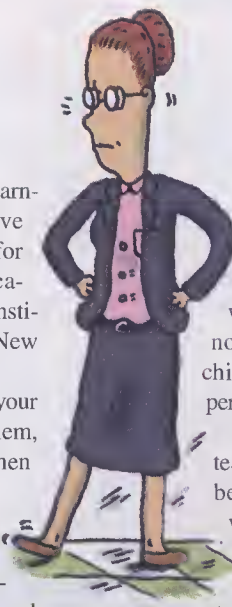
FINDING A SOLUTION

How can you handle the problem? These steps can help resolve classroom issues:

Get a close-up view of the child's day. Spend a morning in the classroom to see what is going on. The problem may actually lie with someone or something other than the teacher. "Perhaps the child sits next to a bully or has problems with peers in the cafeteria," comments Grant.

Meet with the teacher. If your child's workload seems overwhelming, broach the subject with the teacher in a non-threatening way. Say, "I'd like to come in and talk about your expectations," rather than making an accusatory remark like, "You give way too much homework!"

Include your child in the conference. "It's good for children to join in when their parents and teacher solve problems together," says Carol Kelly, Ph.D., former president of the National Association of School Psychologists and an elementary-school principal in Jefferson County, Colorado. "This gets the child involved in coming up with solutions."



Encourage the child to make the best of the situation. "Students need to learn how to work within the system," Martin notes. "So explain to your child that things may not be perfect, but that life rarely is."

In some cases, changing teachers is best. "You need to be most concerned about whether your child is learning," says Dr. Kelly. "A child shouldn't have to tough out every situation." ■

Susan Youngwood is the editor of Vermont Parent & Child Magazine and the mother of a seven-year-old girl.

Five Tips for Your Talk With the Teacher

- Think about what you want to say before you go into the conference. Make a few notes.
- Ask for the teacher's observations, and be a good listener.
- Outline the adjustments the teacher and the student need to make. Be specific: For instance, the teacher needs to give a firm due date for assignments, and the child should complete them neatly in pencil on ruled paper.
- Schedule mini-meetings or phone calls so you and the teacher can talk between regular conferences.
- Get outside help. When serious problems arise, such as a situation in which a teacher humiliates a child or is unresponsive to the parent's comments, a third party should mediate. Ask the principal or school psychologist to sit in.

FOR YEARS YOUR CHILD LOVED school and came home talking excitedly about books she was reading and math problems she was tackling. Then something changed. She got a teacher she hated. Experts agree it is almost inevitable that a child will at some time have trouble with a teacher. Whether your child learns from that experience or suffers depends on how you handle the situation.

PINPOINTING THE PROBLEM

Parents will probably have to do some detective work to discover the reason behind a child's waning enthusiasm for school. "Younger children will have less awareness of what the problem is and will be less capable of expressing it," says Michael Martin, the author of *Solve Your Child's School-Related Problems* (HarperPerennial). But even if your child is too young to explain what he is feeling, Martin adds, you can usually spot school problems by the way he behaves. Parents should sense trouble if a child resists going to school, if he pretends to be sick, or if his academic skills deteriorate or his social skills decline (he loses friends or acts depressed).

When confronted with these red flags, "parents need to help sort out what the real issue is," says Jim Grant, the author of

Hey, Dad! Isn't It Your Night To Cook?

Quick Mexican Pizza

2 cups (8 oz.)
shredded Colby/Monterey
Jack cheese
1/2 lb. ground beef
4 flour tortillas (10 in.)
1 cup salsa
1 1/2 tsp. chili powder
1/2 tsp. cumin
green/red peppers,
onions, mushrooms, etc.
(as desired)

Cook meat, drain. Stir in seasonings. Spread 1/4 cup salsa and 1/2 cup meat mixture on each tortilla. Top each with 1/2 cup cheese and desired toppings. Bake in preheated 400° F oven 8-10 minutes or until crisp and lightly browned.

Makes 4 servings.

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Creative, tasty things to do with turkey NOW WE'RE COOKING

BY JEAN GALTON

A New Life for Leftovers

THANKSGIVING DAY COMES AND GOES, BUT the turkey seems to last forever. What can you do with the leftovers? Try one or all of these five kid-friendly, low-fat recipes, and just watch that turkey disappear.



CHUNKY ALPHABET SOUP

PREPARATION TIME: 15 MINUTES

COOKING TIME: 15 MINUTES

SERVINGS: 6

You're never too old to enjoy alphabet soup, especially if it's full of turkey, sweet parsnips, and carrots.

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 2 medium carrots, peeled and chopped
- 2 medium parsnips, peeled and chopped
- 2 large branches fresh thyme or 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 3 cans (14½ ounces each)

- low-sodium chicken broth
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup alphabet pasta or orzo
- 2 cups diced cooked turkey
- 1 cup frozen petite peas
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped parsley

1. In a large saucepan, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add onion, carrots, and parsnips. Cook, stirring frequently,

MENU

CHUNKY ALPHABET
SOUP

TURKEY ROLL-UPS

DAY-AFTER
SANDWICHES

NOVEMBER CHILI

about 5 minutes. Stir in thyme and broth and bring to a boil.

2. Add pasta and turkey and simmer until pasta is cooked, about 5 minutes. Mix in peas and parsley and let sit for 2 minutes. Remove thyme sprigs and serve hot.

Nutritional information per serving: 284 cal, 7 g fat, 2 g saturated fat, 22% cal from fat, 22 g protein, 36 g carbohydrates, 190 mg sodium, 36 mg cholesterol

TURKEY ROLL-UPS

PREPARATION TIME: 20 MINUTES

COOKING TIME: 15 MINUTES

SERVINGS: 4-6

Any food is fun to eat when it's wrapped in a tortilla. The cucumbers and red peppers add a touch of color to this dish.

- 8 fat-free flour tortillas
- 2 cups shredded cooked turkey
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 1 small yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 can (15 ounces) reduced-sodium black beans, drained, liquid reserved
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup low-fat sour cream
- 1 large red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and cut in thin strips
- 1 small cucumber, peeled, seeded, and cut in thin strips
- 4 scallions, thinly sliced (optional)
- 2 cups thinly shredded romaine lettuce

Continued NOW WE'RE COOKING

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Wrap tortillas in foil and bake for 10 minutes or until hot. Wrap turkey in foil and place in oven until heated, about 10–15 minutes.
2. Heat oil in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onion and cook until lightly browned, stirring occasionally, about 5 minutes. Stir in beans and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup bean liquid. Cook, mashing beans with a wooden spoon (so they become a somewhat lumpy paste), until heated through, about 3–4 minutes.
3. Spread 2 tablespoons bean mixture over tortilla surface. Spread 2 teaspoons sour cream over beans. Along the near edge of tortilla, place $\frac{1}{4}$ cup turkey, 2 tablespoons red pepper, 2 tablespoons cucumber, a

sprinkle of scallion, and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup lettuce. Roll tortilla starting from near edge. Cut in half on the diagonal and place seam down on serving plates. Cover to keep warm and repeat with remaining tortillas.

Nutritional information per serving: 378 cal, 6 g fat, 2 g saturated fat, 14% cal from fat, 28 g protein, 56 g carbohydrates, 608 mg sodium, 48 mg cholesterol

DAY-AFTER SANDWICHES

PREPARATION TIME: 10 MINUTES

COOKING TIME: 15 MINUTES

SERVINGS: 4

These hearty turkey sandwiches definitely call for a knife and fork. Cook up some mashed potatoes, and dinner is served.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 large shallots, minced
- $\frac{1}{2}$ pound cremini or button mushrooms, trimmed and thinly sliced
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 can (14½ ounces) low-sodium chicken broth
- 2 teaspoons low-sodium soy sauce
- 12 ounces leftover turkey, thinly sliced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 4 sourdough rolls, split and toasted
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley (optional)

1. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add shallots and cook, stirring frequently, until soft, about 1–2 minutes. Stir in mushrooms and cook until browned, about 4 minutes.
2. Put flour and 1 cup broth in

a tightly sealed jar, shake until blended and pour into skillet. With a wooden spoon, scrape any browned particles from the bottom of the skillet and stir into mixture. Stir in remaining broth and soy sauce and bring to a boil. Simmer until thickened (about 1–2 minutes) and stir in turkey. Season with salt and pepper and simmer 3 minutes or until turkey is heated through.

3. Place rolls on serving plates and top with turkey. Ladle on gravy and sprinkle with parsley. Serve hot.

Nutritional information per serving: 387 cal, 10 g fat, 2 g saturated fat, 24% cal from fat, 34 g protein, 40 g carbohydrates, 560 mg sodium, 65 mg cholesterol

Jean Galton is a mother and a coauthor of 365 Great Soups and Stews (HarperCollins).

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NOVEMBER CHILI

PREPARATION TIME: 10 MINUTES

COOKING TIME: 20 MINUTES

SERVINGS: 2 ADULT, 4 CHILD

This turkey-filled chili makes for a cozy dinner on a cold night. For children, the dish is less spicy than it is for adults.

ADULT VERSION

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 6 scallions, thinly sliced
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 large poblano pepper, cored, seeded, and chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and chopped
- 1 can (15½ ounces) pinto beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 can (15¼ ounce) kidney

beans, rinsed and drained

- 1 can (28 ounces) crushed tomatoes

- 1 tablespoon chili powder

- 1 teaspoon dried oregano

- 1½ teaspoons ground cumin

- 2 cups leftover turkey, cut in bite-size pieces

Salt and freshly ground

black pepper, to taste

- ¼ cup chopped cilantro

1. Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add scallions, garlic, poblano pepper, and red pepper. Cook, stirring frequently, for 3 minutes.

2. Stir in pinto and kidney beans, tomatoes, chili powder, oregano, cumin, turkey, salt, and pepper. Simmer uncovered for 15 minutes. Stir in cilantro and serve hot.

Nutritional information per serving: 721 cal, 18 g fat, 3 g saturated fat, 22% cal from fat, 67 g protein, 77 g carbohydrates, 1,422 mg sodium, 108 mg cholesterol

KID VERSION

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil

- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped

- 1 red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and chopped

- 3 cloves garlic, minced

- 1 tablespoon mild chili powder

- 1 can (15½ ounce) pinto beans, rinsed and drained

- 1 can (15¼ ounce) kidney beans, rinsed and drained

- 1 can (28 ounces) crushed tomatoes

- 2 cups leftover turkey,

cut in bite-size pieces
Salt and freshly ground
black pepper, to taste
¼ cup chopped cilantro
(optional)

1. Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onion, red pepper, and garlic. Cook, stirring frequently, until the onion is soft, about 3–4 minutes.

2. Stir in chili powder, pinto and kidney beans, tomatoes, turkey, salt, and pepper. Simmer uncovered for 15 minutes. Stir in cilantro and serve hot.

Nutritional information per serving: 370 cal, 11 g fat, 2 g saturated fat, 25% cal from fat, 33 g protein, 37 g carbohydrates, 698 mg sodium, 52 mg cholesterol



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1• Heat oven to 375F. 2• Combine Crisco, sugar, milk, and vanilla in large bowl. Beat at medium speed until blended. Beat in egg. 3• Combine flour, salt, baking soda. Beat into mixture at low speed. Stir in chips. Drop rounded tablespoonfuls onto ungreased baking sheet. 4• Bake 8–9 min. for chewy cookies. 11–13 min. for crisp. Let cool. Makes about 3 doz cookies.

- ¾ cup Butter Flavor* Crisco
- 1–¼ cups packed light brown sugar
- 2 Tbsp milk
- 1 Tbsp vanilla
- 1 egg
- 1–¾ cups flour
- 1 tsp salt
- ¾ tsp baking soda
- 1–½ cups chocolate chips

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Cooks who know
trust



My journey into one of the strange places motherhood takes us

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

BY ILENE RAYMOND

The Mommy Zone

IT BEGAN AS AN ORDINARY day, with a visit by me and my 3½-year-old son to the health club. But suddenly I found myself in that place I now think of as...the Mommy Zone.

I'm happily bubbling away in the Jacuzzi when my son announces he needs to go potty. "But not the *g-rill's*," he insists. "Because I'm a boy."

I consider. He's still a baby, but old enough to know the difference.

"Mommy is here," I tell him as I walk him to the men's locker room. "But she can't come in with you."

Impressed with his new status, he nods. Today the men's room; tomorrow the car.

And then he goes and I am left to wait. Three, five, seven minutes pass as I press against the gray steel doors of the men's lockers like a crazed groupie. I am about to send the next muscle man I see on a search mission when I hear it:

"I need to wipe!" he screams. "I need paper, now!" I begin to tell him to ask one of the nice men for help when my fate is sealed: "I can't talk to strangers!" he cries.

So there I am, caught. I draw a deep breath, call, "Coming through!" and then, shoulder crashing against the door, barrel into the

Eyes steadfastly fixed to the linoleum, I rush past 14 body-builders wrapped in nothing but little white towels, with biceps, triceps, and other bulges barely concealed. I leap past the thankfully empty urinals and into a stall to rescue my hysterical son who is reciting, like some crazed Hare Krishna devotee, "Wipe me now!"

Automatic pilot kicks in: I locate the toilet



paper and do what needs to be done. My son's pants pulled up and the toilet flushed, I'm planning to make Olympic time out of there when he reminds me that his hands need washing. "Not right now," I grit between my teeth. "But I have to," he insists. And then, in a coup de grâce that leaves me speechless, he screams, "I have *poop* on my thumb!" It's too much. The entire room erupts. Laughter. Chuckles. Guffaws.

It was at this moment that I stepped into the fourth dimension—the Mommy Zone. A place where, no matter how much you feel deserving of respect, you must leave everything familiar behind. It is a moment of fear and more embarrassment than it's

possible to imagine.

In one of the teen magazines I read as a girl, there was a column entitled, "Was My Face Red!" The feature captured the awful state of adolescence with stories about girls whose training bras gave out in gym class or had broccoli slivers caught between their front teeth during the entire junior prom!

The message was clear: Thirteen was Hell.

But 13 has nothing on the Mommy Zone.

Absorbed in such thoughts, I left the health club with my son. Once we were seated in the car, he broke the silence.

"You know, Mom," he began. "You eat a *peach*, and you swim at the *beach*."

I looked at him. His damp hair lay in thick waves; his cheeks were flushed. So what if those Arnold Schwarzenegger wannabes believed I was Queen of the

Dorks? I had mothered a great, if still potty-challenged, child.

And in the midst of all this, I had my own inspiration, a trick I learned in seventh grade. To even the score, all I had to do was imagine my tormentors caught in some embarrassing moment. I just needed to update the imagery. So as I bent to kiss my son's curls, I simply envisioned those chuckling body-beautifuls with a bit of spit-up on their perfected pecs, a leaky diaper they needed to deal with, or a dear little *g-rill* of their very own, who, deep inside the ladies' locker room, is screeching for them to please hurry in.

I grinned all the way home. ■

Ilene Raymond writes frequently on parenting topics.

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